The New Criterion

May 1999

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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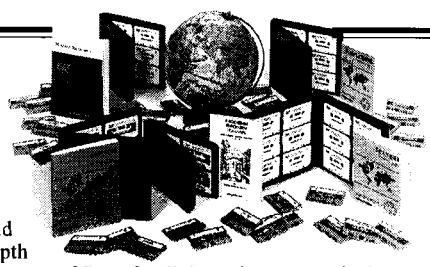

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Notes & Comments: May 1999

More and more of everything

The dictum "less is more" is usually attributed to the German architect Mies van der Rohe. It is a saying easy to mock. There are many circumstances, however, for which we are tempted to regard it as Algernon (in *The Importance of Being Earnest*) regarded one of his own *mots*: "It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilized life should be." When it comes to cultural life, at any rate, we believe that Mies's stern observation is far preferable to Robert Venturi's smirking riposte, "Less is a bore." For one thing, Venturi's rejoinder—or rather the spirit it heralded—turned out to be a license for cultural pollution, A.K.A. postmodernism. For another thing, if there are plenty of circumstances in which "less is more" is inapplicable or just plain wrong, there are also many circumstances in which mere proliferation is a disaster. Less isn't always more; but when it comes to the life of the mind and the vitality of high culture, more isn't always more either.

We had occasion to ponder this seeming conundrum recently while reading "All Culture, All the Time," the cover story of the April issue of *Reason* magazine. Written by Nick Gillespie, a senior editor at *Reason*, this long and thoughtful essay argues vigorously for more being more. According to Mr. Gillespie, we are living through a cultural renaissance. "During the past few decades," he writes, "we have been experiencing what can aptly be called a 'culture boom': a massive and prolonged increase in art, music, literature, video, and other forms of creative expression. Everywhere we look, the cultural marketplace is open and ready for business." He cites the increased numbers of books sold and bookstores that sell them, the increased number of stores that rent videos and the number of VCRs and television sets with which to watch them. Many network stations used to go off the air for several hours a day: now most are broadcasting around the clock. There are more art galleries, more museums, more symphony orchestras, more dance companies, more theaters, more internet sites and more computers to access them—in short, there is "more and more of everything."

Mr. Gillespie couldn't be happier about this development. He sees it as part of "a broad-based, centuries-old trend that also includes generally longer lives, increased wealth, and the greater personal autonomy that accompanies such developments." Just as the stock market has fueled extraordinary economic prosperity, so the "culture boom" has enriched us individually. "Relatively speaking," he concludes, "we're all aristocrats now." Mr. Gillespie not only regards this as an excellent

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thing in itself, but also hails it as an effective check on those "moral crusaders and cultural critics"—"commissars" he calls them at one point—who worry about cultural standards and who are disinclined to equate "more" with "better." For while Mr. Gillespie thinks that "the culture wars, like competition in economics or politics, are a marker of a healthy, diverse, engaged society," he is profoundly irritated by the idea of "a 'common' or 'national' culture," "received interpretations," and the polemics of "cultural commissars, whether conservative or progressive, who argue that culture should be didactic and instructive toward a single set of desired ends."

Mr. Gillespie dilates enthusiastically on this point. He is a firm believer in the old adage *chacun à son goût*: "One man's 'pap,' after all, is another man's Proust—and we've entered a phase where people are increasingly willing to argue the point. Proclamations of artistic or social value can no longer be issued ex cathedra but must now be submitted before a skeptical audience." Among other things, this "decentralization" of culture allows people "to opt out of someone else's cultural value system. . . . People are freer now to look elsewhere, to pursue their own interests to their own ends." This is a very good thing, Mr. Gillespie insists, not least because "the most vibrant cultures, like the most vibrant economies and political systems, are ones in which people are as free as possible to define and choose what is valuable and meaningful to them."

It sounds wonderful. Freedom. Choice. Autonomy. Liberty. These are lovely words. And although it is not at all clear that the historical record supports Mr. Gillespie's claim that "the most vibrant cultures . . . are ones in which people are as free as possible to define and choose what is valuable and meaningful to them," we appreciate the generous spirit that informs his encomium. Nevertheless, we have serious reservations about Mr. Gillespie's diagnosis. Consider: "One man's 'pap,' after all, is another man's Proust." What can that mean? Mr. Gillespie assures us that the burgeoning "consumption" of culture he sees everywhere "hardly means that cultural standards have been obliterated, any more than freedom of religion means that theological standards have disappeared."

Would that it were so. But in a cultural situation like the present what we see is not so much the "multiplication" of standards, as Mr. Gillespie would have it, as the degradation of standards. Indeed, the multiplication of standards always entails the degradation of standards. And today, when so much popular culture is indistinguishable from moronic pornography, Mr. Gillespie's populist cheerleading is especially ominous. He is happy that, when it comes to music, "consumers" can freely choose among "Mozart, Mingus, and Marilyn Manson." But even to mention Mozart together with Marilyn Manson—a freakish rock star named for Marilyn Monroe and Charles Manson—is to give the game away. (In fact, we believe that to mention Mozart in the same breath as the jazz bassist Charlie Mingus is almost equally problematic, but we will not pursue that issue now.)

The hard truth is that in a sitution where "one man's 'pap' . . . is another man's Proust," what one faces is not cultural "profusion" but cultural chaos. Mr. Gillespie's essay is accompanied by several charts plotting the upward curve of books sold, VCRs owned, concerts attended, art works purchased, and so on. It is indeed "more and more of everything." But mostly, alas, it is more and more garbage. Nor is that all. The deeper problem is that the proliferation Mr. Gillespie champions not only elevates pap to the status of Proust. It also tends to reduce Proust to the level of pap. Here as elsewhere the "multiplication" of standards is at bottom prelude to the abandonment of standards. The "culture boom" that Mr. Gillespie celebrates involves more boom than culture. Far from transforming us all into cultural "aristocrats," it

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impoverishes us by making the possession of worthwhile culture increasingly difficult and increasingly fragile.

Mr. Gillespie would doubtless ask, "Who's to say what's worthwhile?" If one man's pap really is another man's Proust, this question can have no answer. But of course, the very idea of "pap"—"something," the dictionary tells us, "lacking real value or substance, and considered unsuitable for the minds of adults"—shows that Mr. Gillespie's equation is specious. Our language and our behavior constantly bear witness to the fact that we recognize artistic and moral standards independent of our personal likes and dislikes. If we sometimes fail to live up to those standards . . . well, that is something traditional theology easily accounts for. In the cultural realm, it is something that criticism can account for, which is one reason T. S. Eliot was right when he defined the critic's task as "the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." As Eliot recognized, more is by no means always better.

Partly infuriating, partly pathetic

A modest but effective example of the sort of thing Eliot had in mind is the annual Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the scholarly journal *Philosophy and Literature*. Previous winners have included the Marxist Fredric Jameson and the postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha. This year's winner is Judith Butler, a celebrated "Queer Theorist" who teaches at the University of California at Berkeley. Hailed by one admirer as "one of the ten smartest people on the planet," Professor Butler won with this sentence published in the journal *Diacritics*:

> The move from the structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

Although it is sobering to reflect on how many other worthy contenders there are for the prize of bad writing—anyone familiar with contemporary academic writing could easily produce dozens of examples equally as absurd—still most readers will acknowledge that Professor Butler has that certain *je ne sais quoi* that makes for really horrible, teeth-grinding prose. It's a mixture, we'd say, of about equal parts pretentious polysyllabic verbiage and politicized menace. It's the same sort of thing that distinguishes the efforts of Professors Jameson and Bhabha.

Like all such performances, Professor Butler's is partly infuriating, partly pathetic. One alternates between irritation and pity. But her Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* defending bad writing is pure comedy. We especially liked her quotation from the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno: "Man is the ideology of dehumanization." "Taken out of context," Professor Butler allows, "the sentence may seem vainly paradoxical. But it becomes clear when we recognize that in Adorno's time the word 'man' was used by humanists to regard the individual in isolation from his or her social context. For Adorno, to be deprived of one's social context was precisely to suffer dehumanization. Thus, 'man' is the ideology of dehumanization." Q.E.D. As a self-declared radical, Professor Butler would of course strenuously oppose Nick Gillespie's celebration of the cultural free market. But we suspect she would agree with the sentiment behind his assertion that "one man's 'pap' is another man's Proust." Which is yet another reason to regard it with suspicion.

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The betrayal of liberalism: IX

Procedure or dogma: the core of liberalism

by John Silber

Liberalism: has any other word been used in more senses? Is there another word whose definition is so constrained by time and context? I face the issue baffled, and my bafflement is personal as well as conceptual. I have almost always thought of myself as a liberal, yet in the marketplace of ideas I am almost always called a conservative. This seems an ill-fitting description for someone who remembers a time when members of the John Birch Society attended his public lectures and recorded them for transmission to the FBI as evidence that he was a Communist. I am, of course, familiar with present-day conservatives who became such by beginning with Communism and traveling through Trotskyism, socialism, social democracy and the whole breadth of the Democratic party. But along the way they kept changing their minds. As far as I can see, I began as a liberal and with no more adjustments than reality required have remained one.

Enjoying the advantages of hindsight, I see that I have been a liberal since I was a child. One day on a bus in San Antonio, I was sitting toward the rear when a black woman whom I as a ten-year-old perceived to be elderly got on. As she approached my seat in the crowded bus, I got up to offer it to her. This was simply what I had been taught to do by my father, who told my brother and me to offer our seats to the old, especially women, observing, "Your young legs are never as tired as theirs."

The woman thanked me and prepared to sit down. Suddenly there were shouts of "Sit down, nigger-lover," and "Nigger, keep going to the back of the bus." The woman moved on and I remained standing. I was furious at the violation of everything I had been taught in Sunday School. That woman needed my seat and those haters were wrong to deny her. I was morally outraged. What had happened to the Golden Rule? Weren't we supposed to learn something from the story of the Good Samaritan?

Looking back on this event, still as fresh in my memory as if it had happened yesterday, I think it was the first indication that I was a liberal. A year later, I knew I was a Democrat. The Depression was disastrous for my family. My father's flourishing architectural practice suddenly collapsed: he was forced to dismiss his staff and close his office. Unable to meet the mortgage payments on our house, we moved to a succession of rented houses, each smaller than the one before, until my mother took charge and bought a small house for $25 down and her personal assurance that $25 mortgage payments would follow each month. The size of the downpayment proved that the Depression had devastated property owners as well. My grandmother and my parents occupied the bedrooms and my brother and I got the sleeping porch.

As much as an exercise as anything, my father drew up plans for enlarging our house and making it livable, but there was

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no money to carry out the plans. One day my father—a staunch Republican, remembering better times under Hoover and deeply disappointed in Roosevelt—announced happily that construction would begin. He had just received approval of a loan from the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, one of Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives. One Sunday, when guests had come to dinner, and my father had as usual held forth on the virtues of the GOP, I asked him after the guests had left, "Why are you against Roosevelt? Everything good that has happened to us has happened under Roosevelt." My mother agreed fully, and I knew from that day forward that I was a Democrat.

One New Deal program after another added to the quality of our lives and our community. Schools were built as WPA projects. Mayor Maury Maverick obtained federal funds for the restoration of the Spanish missions, including the Alamo, as well as La Villita, the original village of San Antonio. The WPA put men to work building Alamo Stadium, a football field for all the local high schools. Although my father had no political skills or connections, and thus did not win contracts to build any of the federal buildings constructed in the 1930s, the ripple effect of modest recovery brought him some small commissions.

I entered high school pro-Roosevelt, pro-labor, and pro-civil rights. The brilliant musician who directed our band, orchestra, and music ensembles was principal clarinetist in the San Antonio Symphony, and with a large family to support he also played in the evening with dance orchestras. From him I learned what James C. Petrillo and the American Federation of Musicians had meant to musicians. When a group of high school students organized a swing band that began to play major dances, he arranged for them to join the Musicians' Union without paying an initiation fee on the condition that from that time forward they would charge union scale. He explained that when high school kids without families to support charged less than half union scale, they took bread out of the mouths of the families of adult musicians. This seemed right to me: I continued to be a liberal.

After college, I attended Yale Divinity School. As an assignment in Christian ethics I interviewed the relatives, undertakers, and ministers who had taken part in Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish funerals. I called my paper—anticipating Jessica Mitford by fifteen years—"The High Cost of Dying." I was deeply moved by the example of an Italian funeral director who said of infants' funerals, "I persuade the family to buy at my cost the least expensive casket and I urge them to lay the keel for their next child." I was equally impressed with the Episcopal priest of a fashionable New Haven parish who told me he always accompanied the family to the funeral parlor where he insisted that they see the less expensive caskets. He reminded them that he covered the casket with a black pall before it entered the church and that the parish provided the only flowers. He urged his parishioners not to waste huge sums on the dead but to spend on the living. His ethical standards were in contrast to those of a highly fashionable New Haven undertaker who argued that a man who drove a Cadillac should be buried in a bronze casket, his principle being—at least in the marketplace—"As a man lives so should he be buried."

In the spring of 1948, the presidential campaign was in full swing. As one might imagine, many of the Yale faculty and their graduate students supported Henry Wallace and his Progressive Party. Many of my fellow students urged me to support Wallace, and I always told them that a vote for Wallace was a vote for Dewey and a vote against every New Deal program they favored. For sticking with Truman and the Democratic Party I found my liberalism questioned—absurdly, I thought—by many on the left. I would not realize the full implications of these characterizations until many years later.

That summer I returned to San Antonio and worked as an enumerator for the Bureau of the Census on a survey of manu-

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facturers. As part of this survey I found myself assisting the *patrón* of a tortilla factory with his forms. Leaving his small establishment, I entered a narrow doorway and was suddenly on the inside of the same block of buildings I had been reviewing from without. Behind all of the storefronts, unseen from the streets, was a fetid barrio of hovels occupied by scores of families, a barrio without proper sanitation and where all families drew water from a single spigot.

When September came I entered the Law School of the University of Texas. There I had the privilege of studying Constitutional law with Professor Jerre Williams, who completed his distinguished career on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Near the end of my first semester I told him I wanted to bring the rule of law to the families living in the barrios. The owners who rented those hovels violated sanitation codes, fire codes, and doubtless many others. Professor Williams was sympathetic, but he explained that if I entered the barrios to solicit business I would be committing barratry and be subject to disbarment. Two decades before they were invented, I was a premature storefront lawyer. A just society, I thought, must provide access to the law courts to all citizens; a society cannot be just if the rule of law is limited to persons of means. Those who cannot afford access to the courts do not live in a society of laws.

The following fall I returned to Yale to complete my PhD in philosophy. After joining the faculty I taught a course in the Master of Arts in Teaching program and for the first time I came face to face with the problems of the public schools. I was appalled by the treatment of minority and poor children at an elementary school in which Yale placed students for their practice teaching. I was brought face to face with the fact that poor and minority children were being denied equal educational opportunity. This experience alerted me early in my career to the lack of equal opportunity.

In 1955 I was back in Austin as an assistant professor of philosophy. In 1957, a spectacular soprano named Barbara Smith was thrown out of the School of Music's production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* on the orders of the administration. The only objection to Miss Smith was that she was black. This objection had not been made by the faculty or administration, but by members of the legislature and by anonymous callers who threatened violence if Miss Smith appeared on stage with a white Aeneas. The University decided to knuckle under to threats of violence. I challenged that decision by presenting my objections privately and in writing to Chancellor Logan Wilson. He offered no moral or legal justification of the university's clear violation of Miss Smith's constitutional rights, now clearly defined by the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court in *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka*.

I then took my objections to the floor of the faculty council where they fell on largely deaf ears. Despite the fact that Miss Smith's moral and legal rights were being violated, a committee of senior faculty, including Dean Page Keeton of the law school and other eminent "liberals," found that no reasonable person could disagree with the decision of the Chancellor. I observed then, and have never forgotten, that persons recognized as liberals sometimes behave as if they were autoimmune diseases designed to attack their own kind.

The phenomenon of liberals attacking liberals was made clear when the *Texas Observer*, under the editorship of Ronnie Dugger, endorsed a young Republican, John Tower, for the U.S. Senate and excoriated his elderly Democratic opponent, Coke Stevenson. I pointed out to Dugger that time would soon defeat Coke Stevenson but that young John Tower would be a senator for decades to come. "Why," I asked, "do you want to be represented for many years by an extremely conservative Republican in order to avoid being represented for a few years by a moderately conservative Democrat?" I found no logical or causal nexus between Dugger's editorial policy and his professed objectives.

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The defection of the liberals elected John Tower and greatly aided the development of a two-party system in Texas, but Dugger had not supported Tower on behalf of a two-party system. He wished to purge a Democrat whose liberal credentials he judged insufficient. The resentment of so-called liberals toward those who failed the liberal litmus test as they defined it led to the wholesale defection of liberal Democrats in the presidential race in 1968. They, not the Republicans, defeated Hubert Humphrey and elected Richard Nixon. There may have been good reasons to vote for Nixon, but there was no reason to believe that he was less committed to war in Vietnam than Humphrey, whose reservations about the war were well-known.

My credentials as a liberal were firmly established by my support of Barbara Smith and the fuller integration of the University of Texas. My standing was solidified when I helped organize the Texas Society to Abolish Capital Punishment and wrote, spoke, and testified in favor of ending the death penalty in Texas. My opposition to the death penalty was not based, however, on the mistaken view that it is wrong in principle to take a human life. The police, in order to save the lives of innocent victims, are frequently forced to kill persons intent on harming others. I also knew that there are serious crimes committed by rational people who deserve the death penalty. A man who bombs an airplane in flight to collect his wife's insurance offers an excellent example. But despite the need to satisfy the understandable public demand for vengeance, the death penalty as an appropriate means for dealing with murder is not so effective or so safe as the alternative of life imprisonment. It poses unacceptable risks of executing the innocent, of setting the guilty free by juries unwilling to expose the defendant to the possibility of the death penalty, and of inequitably imposing on the poor and the deranged, who are frequently sentenced to death not so much for their crimes, as for their inability to hire a competent lawyer.

Death row in Huntsville, Texas, I observed, was occupied by poor Blacks and Hispanics represented by court-appointed attorneys who, in most cases, had presented no evidence on behalf of their clients. These defendants had not received due process of law. Typically, their defense was nothing more than a closing speech to the jury. Quakers in Texas were disappointed that I did not oppose the death penalty in principle, but that did not lead them to expel me from the congregations of the righteous. They supported my work because they knew that on different principles we were working toward the same end.

Continuing my interest in the public schools, I wrote a short paper on the importance of preschool nurture in the home and pre-kindergarten programs in the schools. I sent this piece, which I called "Breaking the Cycle of Poverty," to Senator Ralph Yarborough, the doyen of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in Texas. As a result, I was invited to Washington to work with Sargent Shriver on the committee that designed the Head Start program. I also evaluated some proposals for Otis Singletary, the first director of the Job Corps, and was an occasional sounding board when he wished to review problems in its administration. These liberal initiatives were based on our duty as Americans to provide equality of opportunity and on the fact that equality was denied many children of the ghetto or from dysfunctional homes.

But later I opposed the movement by educators and legislators to confuse equality of opportunity with equality of achievement. That false doctrine destroyed the academic quality of many colleges and universities, including City College of New York, and led to the current classroom fad of treating self-esteem as an inherent right rather than as something to be earned. Television has gone still further, with one children's program having a theme song affirming "the most important person in the entire wide world is you, you, you."

I recount my activities at this length to

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show how unlikely it would be for anyone to regard me as anything but a liberal. But I forgot that some persons equated liberals and Communists. I noted that John Birchers had begun attending my classes to record them. These thought police, defining political correctness in their fashion, brought a little innocent merriment to my classes when I would refute their curious notion that the United States could not be a democracy because it was a republic. I pointed out that a republic is a kind of democracy, just as a collie is a kind of dog. There was no question that the Birchers thought that, far from being a liberal, I was a Communist. I suspect my FBI file contains transcripts of those lectures, sent thither by the Birchers in aid of their claims that I was a dangerous man. And I have no doubt that many conservative Texans who would never have joined the John Birch Society suspected that I was a fellow traveler.

I began to learn that ideologues, whether left or right, have great trouble in recognizing liberals because they don't know what liberalism means. They confuse the pursuit of goals believed to be liberal with the rigorous procedure of thought and observation by which the genuine liberal discovers his goals.

In 1967 I became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences just as the student protests at Berkeley, Columbia, and Cornell began to erupt. Eventually the movement came to Austin along with the SDS. By 1968 the democratic idealism of the Port Huron Statement had been severely compromised. Forgetting they were students for a democratic society, the SDS assaulted the intellectual integrity of the university and academic freedom by using pressure tactics in an effort to determine administrative policy.

I observed the heady effects of "power" on Larry Caroline, a promising young philosopher whom I had myself recruited. He had learned that if he addressed a crowd of protesters with outrageous and highly inflammatory statements, he was cheered on the spot and got his name in the papers. And for this purpose, lies were as good as truths. Lies were often better, because contrary to conventional wisdom, although truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, this is not the way to bet. Among the lies he told students was that there were five concentration camps in the state of Texas posing a threat to his black brothers who were naturally fearful because of the camps' existence. When I asked for locations of these camps, he had no answer, but he did not retract the claim.

This and other false statements aroused the ire of Frank Erwin, chairman of the Regents, who demanded that Caroline be fired. I responded that Caroline should not be fired. His contract had only a year to go, and his appointment had been conditional on his completing his dissertation, on which in the event he had done nothing. This fact alone would have made it extremely unlikely that the contract would be renewed, even had his political behavior been such that Erwin would have considered him a desirable son-in-law. Moreover, I considered his cynical abandonment of the pursuit of truth in favor of notoriety gained by lying to large crowds of students in the presence of the media as a violation of his obligations as a faculty member under AAUP principles.

As might have been expected, of course, Caroline's claimed status as a political martyr gained him the support of activist junior faculty and even the support of some senior faculty who viewed his political views with amused contempt or downright detestation and regarded him as an academic layabout. The Department of Philosophy, over the objections of the chairman, voted by a small majority to extend his contract. I, as dean, vetoed the reappointment.

My friend Ronnie Dugger, reflecting the views of many others, argued that Caroline's place at the center of a political brawl in which conservatives were howling for his blood entitled him to a reappointment they would have admitted he did not deserve on academic grounds. Put bluntly, they were saying that the enemy of our enemy is our

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friend. Outside the academy, the right wing had long engaged in such politicization of the search for truth; now, with seeming enthusiasm, not merely leftists but those who considered themselves liberals joined in.

In his recent book *The Politics of Authenticity*, the historian Doug Rossinow writes that I, "the most prominent liberal on campus since the mid-fifties . . . started moving toward [my] later neo-conservatism and worked to get Caroline fired." Aside from the erroneous claim about my having worked to fire Caroline when in fact I had argued before the Regents that he not be fired, this statement encapsulates the now widespread view in the academy not only that there can be no enemies on the left, but also that no careers should suffer for academic deficiencies. It is largely forgotten that the AAUP stressed responsibility in the exercise of academic freedom, and few universities and colleges hold a professor speaking *ex cathedra* to a higher standard of truth-telling and respect for his special obligation to his students than when he is speaking merely as a citizen. By widely accepted current standards, as long as one holds views currently accepted as politically correct, there can be no justification for removing him even if that person fails to complete his dissertation, falsifies evidence, or encourages drug use by his adolescent students, all of which Caroline did.[1]

This is a curious inversion of the liberal commitment to academic freedom, which defends the right of individuals to be politically incorrect. That quaint notion is in deep trouble, as is brilliantly and depressingly demonstrated by Alan Kors and Harvey Silverglate in *The Shadow University*.

Shortly after the Caroline case, I found myself fired as dean of my college over reasons unrelated to my political views or indeed any academic issue. But the justifications for my firing never failed to mention my left-wing views, and I came to have the reputation of being not merely a card-carrying liberal, but, in the views of some who saw this as even a higher distinction, a card-carrying Marxist. This reputation, entirely undeserved, eased my way into the presidency of Boston University. My refusal to bow to the irrational demands of the SDS and the black power advocates and my refusal to overlook the incompetence of Larry Caroline were all forgotten.

My name was called to the attention of the trustees of Boston University in the fall of 1970 by Professor Robert Cohen, who was one of the fellow graduate students who had solicited my support for Henry Wallace. He was a leading member of the Boston University faculty, having joined the university in the 1950s along with several other professors of Marxist or socialist persuasion. He wielded considerable influence on the search committee, which included two Marxist undergraduates, two graduate students sympathetic to radical student movements of the time, and faculty representatives including more than one Marxist, in addition to a handful of trustees and administrators.

After having met with the committee on several occasions and with other groups of students, faculty, administrators, and trustees, I was invited in November to a dinner meeting with the search committee and some others. Among these was a strongly anti-Marxist industrialist and intellectual named Arthur Metcalf. I later learned that in view of my strong support from left-wing faculty and students, he was there to determine if I was a Communist. My support by some of the best-known Marxists on the faculty had alarmed some members of the board. They wanted Metcalf, the most knowledgeable trustee on the subject, to determine my political affiliation.

That evening, answering questions about

1 It is relevant to note that I was to hear from Caroline again. In 1987 he wrote me that he had returned to Judaism, become a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and the father of six children. Now looking back at his earlier career, he said, "I truly and literally thank G-d for giving me the opportunity to make amends for the damage I did then. In retrospect, I too would have tried to remove me from the university."

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my opinion of the revolutionary movement, I revealed my knowledge of Marxist argot and won the approval of the Marxists and activists. Metcalf recognized my answers not as advocacy but as the informal responses of a well-informed teacher; he reported that I was not a Communist, and in due course I was offered and accepted the presidency.

Many students and faculty would have disagreed with Metcalf's assessment. Some of my most enthusiastic supporters eagerly anticipated the proclamation of the People's Republic of Boston University. Ideologues, as the Marxists were, do not listen carefully; otherwise, they could never have been confused about my position. Within months, however, the truth began to out, as bit by bit I was incrementally exposed as a liberal, or, to use their term of art, a fascist.

I was committed to an open campus on which all invited guests could speak without regard to their point of view, a campus on which any company or institution engaged in a lawful enterprise could recruit, including all branches of the United States Military. My administration would not tolerate the occupation of university buildings or the blocking of their entrances by student mobs.

I was also opposed to allowing minorities a tyranny no one would accept from majorities. The university had for a half century hosted the ROTC. A guerrilla campaign by a minority of the faculty eventually led the Department of Defense to conclude that there were campuses where the Army and the Air Force could have a quieter life, and both units were withdrawn. I determined to see what the faculty really wanted, by having Price Waterhouse ask each of them, one by one, and in confidence. It turned out that two-thirds of the faculty were in favor of restoring the ROTC. I and most faculty members believed that civilian control of the military is better ensured when a significant percentage of officers are civilian in orientation and educated in civilian institutions rather than in military academies. We also believed that our students in financial need had the right to be eligible for ROTC scholarships. In due time, two units were restored and a Navy unit added. But, of course, it was widely believed that no real liberal could support ROTC.

When Angela Davis was invited to speak on campus advocating revolution, there was no opposition. But when Urie Bronfenbrenner was invited to speak, the situation proved quite different. Professor Bronfenbrenner had published an article in 1967 in which he argued that the brutally inadequate prenatal and postnatal care available to many Black Americans resulted in grave physical and psychological damage. One would have thought that this attempt to document one of the most vicious consequences of racism would have made Bronfenbrenner something of a hero to the left. But a group of SDS members demonstrated determined opposition to hearing from that mild, thoughtful scholar. How, I asked, could any true liberal or one respectful of free speech justify disrupting a speaker on the campus of a university?

Robert Cohen, then dean of the College of Liberal Arts, urged me to cancel the invitation on grounds that there might be violence. I told him, as years earlier I had told Chancellor Logan Wilson when he canceled the opera performance of Barbara Smith, that civilization does not abdicate in the face of barbarians: it calls the police. I arranged for a dozen or more police officers to be stationed on each side of the lecture hall while Professor Bronfenbrenner spoke. It was a nonviolent but sad affair. In response to hostile questions from the crowd, Bronfenbrenner recanted the views unpalatable to his audience, confessing his errors in the manner of a defendant in a Moscow show trial. It was not enough; a leftist academic present at the lecture announced that Bronfenbrenner's recantation was insincere. Andrei Vyshinsky, Stalin's prosecutor in the purge trials, would have approved.

The student left attempted to suppress another basic right, that of free association, when recruiters from the Marine Corps came to campus. A small mob blocked ac-

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cess to the building where some of their fellow students wanted to meet with the recruiters. I went down to talk with the protestors. I explained that they were violating the First Amendment rights of other students and said that they could continue to protest peacefully as long as they respected the rights of others. When they continued, I said that I would make a civilian arrest for trespass and they could make their case in court. They were outraged by the suggestion and continued the blockade. At that point, I called the police to the campus to remove them and restore the rights of their fellow students. This civilized use of force was a liberal imperative, necessary to assure an open campus on which First Amendment rights are respected.

Our administration kept an open campus to ensure the exercise of First Amendment rights and the right of free assembly no matter how hard activist faculty and students tried to shut it down. One eminent and thoughtful captain of the Thought Police was Howard Zinn. When our Latin-American development center organized an international conference attended by, among others, Presidents Eduardo Frei of Chile and Lleras Restrepo of Colombia, Zinn attempted with the help of his students to disrupt it. The police had to be called to restore order and remove the disrupters. It was, however, a civilized use of force to preserve academic freedom and our rights to free speech and assembly. The Zinn principle could be summed up as holding that all academics were entitled to academic freedom, but that some academics were not.

The example of Howard Zinn shows how far we have come from the liberal ideal practiced by Socrates and developed by Milton and Mill. Socrates taught us to prize those persons of knowledge, candor, and good will who challenge our views, and to be especially grateful when we are shown to be mistaken. For then we exchange a false opinion for a truer one. The Socratic dialectic is not dissimilar to the scientific method, which proceeds by proposing hypotheses to be tested by logical analysis for their conceptual coherence and tested empirically for their confirmation or disproof by relevant facts. Apart from divine revelation, to which I am not privileged, there is no means of attaining absolute truth. Our confidence in the outcome of a Socratic argument or a scientific experiment derives not from direct proof of its truth but rather from the absence of its disproof. We never reach the truth, only the likeliest account, which may require revision or even rejection on the basis of subsequent evidence and argument.

It follows that those who seek the truth as closely as is humanly possible will not begin with conclusions and then look for arguments and facts to support them. Rather, they will examine all relevant facts and arguments in the hope of finally arriving at the truest account of the subject of their inquiry. Those who follow the former procedure have abandoned the search for truth in the defense of an ideology from which they will not deviate no matter what contravening arguments or evidence may be presented. Those who seek the truth, by contrast, will follow the second procedure of inquiry and their conclusions will in consequence be subject to change.

For this reason no liberal—unless he abandons the search for truth—can be found on the left of every issue. He will rather be led either to the left or to the right by evidence and argument. He will find his position not at the outset but only at the end of his search. If a liberal holds fast to any set of doctrines without regard to the existence of contravening arguments and evidence, he betrays his liberalism and ceases to be a liberal. E. B. White provided a useful guide for liberalism: "To pursue truth, one should not be too deeply entrenched in any hole."

This is not to suggest that the liberal will have no fixed opinions, for there are some facts that never change and some arguments that are not refuted. But it is generally true, as the old hymn puts it, that "time makes ancient good uncouth." The world is in flux

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and if one is an honest seeker of truth one's views must change as experience dictates.

But there are limits on how far one can change one's views and still deserve the name of liberal. One is not a liberal but an ideologue if one joins the thought police to enforce political correctness in society and especially in academe. One abandons liberalism for ideology. A liberal defends and sometimes exercises the right to be politically incorrect in the Socratic and Millian pursuit of the truest account. Whether evidence or argument leads him to the left or right, he remains a liberal and has every right to object when he is pejoratively described as a conservative.

Paradoxically, it may be that those of us —whether on the left or the right at any one time—who adhere to the Millian procedure of inquiry in the development of our positions are all conservative in the sense that we conserve a methodology begun by Socrates and essential to all scientific thought. But since this mode of thought was systematically presented by Mill, those of us who follow that method are justified in calling ourselves liberals and may expect to be recognized as such. The procedure defines the essence of liberalism.

Many today who wear their liberalism on their sleeves are far from liberal. The rigidity of their adherence to dogmas exposes them as ideologues. And their use of "conservative" as a pejorative epithet is without justification. Many conservatives adhere to the liberal procedure of inquiry but, while following evidence and argument, arrive at conclusions that are right-wing. But there are also ideologues on the right who use evidence and argument to support only antecedent conclusions. They are more accurately described as dogmatic reactionaries.

If we follow the prevalent but mistaken practice of identifying "liberal" with left-wing objectives and "conservative" with right-wing objectives, we will find persons, such as myself, called conservatives who, on the basis of evidence and argument, support politically correct liberal objectives such as the abolition of capital punishment, early childhood education, and affirmative action. But we may be called conservatives because the same procedures of thought lead us to reject as nonsense the views of those who claim privileged access to truth, some unique power of understanding based on gender, race, ethnicity, or some other special dispensation from the hard work required to arrive at the truest account.

Whenever one uses a set of beliefs as a liberal litmus test, one has confused liberalism with dogmatism. The anti-abortionist who is prepared to kill those who support abortion is not a conservative, but a revolutionary. Those who, like Herbert Marcuse, are tolerant only of the positions they accept are not liberals but revolutionaries. In "Repressive Tolerance" (1969), Marcuse advanced the notion that there was no freedom to be wrong and that right could be determined by the voice of a mass meeting however nonrepresentative or small it might be. Thus Marcuse rejected the liberal concept of a free marketplace of ideas in which all positions are allowed to compete on the basis of evidence and argument. He proposed instead to permit only liberating tolerance, that is, only "toleration of movements from the left [extending] the scope of this tolerance . . . to the stage of action as well as of discussion and propaganda, of deed as well as word."

The ideologist of the left is no more liberal than the ideologist of the right, for neither believes in humility before the facts and logic, respect for the experience and views of others, and the importance of making a supreme effort to avoid irrationality. Reactionaries and revolutionaries betray conservatism and liberalism alike. Those who move with some tentativeness and uncertainty as experience and judgment guide them to the best and wisest conclusions of which they are capable, they alone deserve to be called liberals and may claim that name with pride.

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The permanent Auden

by Roger Kimball

"It's such a pity Wystan never grows up."
—Auden, *Letter to Lord Byron*

"I shall only ask you to apply to the work of the deceased a very simple test. How many of his lines can you remember?"
—Auden, "The Public v. the Late Mr. W. B. Yeats"

In June 1994, shortly before Princeton University Press brought out its edition of W. H. Auden's juvenilia, *The New Criterion* published a handful of those apprentice poems from the mid-to-late 1920s. While working on a brief introduction to accompany the selection, I happened to have a conversation with a visiting English critic whose work I admire. I told him I was writing something about Auden's juvenilia. Without missing a beat he said, "It's all juvenilia, isn't it?"

I joined him in a laugh. But his comment did take me aback. W. H. Auden, perhaps the most accomplished poetic craftsman since Yeats—the man who once claimed to have written poems exemplifying every form discussed in George Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody* (three volumes)—a lifelong purveyor of juvenilia? Surely not. Auden was one of the most urbane and insightful essayists of the twentieth century. That much is indisputable. But his poetic stature?

There seem to be two main schools of thought. No one denies the prodigious skill, the cleverness, the wide if quirky erudition on display in Auden's poetry. And very few would deny the strength of many—well, anyway several—poems published between 1930, when his first volume appeared, and around 1940, the year after he emigrated (his enemies said "fled") to the United States. These were the years of most of Auden's anthology pieces: "The Secret Agent," "Lullaby," "As I Walked Out One Evening," "Musée des Beaux Arts," "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," "September 1, 1939," "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," and one or two others. Opinion has long been divided about Auden's later work, especially his work after 1945. And since 1973, when Auden died at the age of sixty-six, opinion has also been increasingly divided about the larger question of what his poetic achievement really adds up to. Does it rival or even surpass that of Yeats or Eliot, say? Or has the discipline of posterity made it seem less capacious, less vital, less necessary?

Auden's champions include many distinguished and articulate figures: poets like Joseph Brodsky, Richard Wilbur, and John Fuller, whose recent reference work, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*,[1] is a meticulous labor of love and scholarship. A much-expanded and revised version of his 1970 *Reader's Guide* to Auden's poems, the new *Commentary* attempts "to say something useful about every original poem, play, or

1 *W. H. Auden: A Commentary*, by John Fuller; Princeton University Press, 640 pages, $35.

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libretto of his written in English that has so far reached print (with the exception of most of the juvenilia . . .)." Among Auden's other commentators, the palm must go to Edward Mendelson, the poet's literary executor, chief editor, bibliographer, and most devoted critic. In *Early Auden* (1981), Professor Mendelson distinguished between the traditions of "civil poetry" and "vatic poetry," locating Auden firmly in the former. "He had no wish to achieve an imaginative triumph over common reality," Professor Mendelson wrote in his introduction. "His poems were not visionary autonomous objects, exempt from the practical and ethical standards appropriate to all other human works. They were made to be judged both for their art and their truth." What Auden wanted, Professor Mendelson wrote later in the book, was "poetry that reflected the formal and linguistic lessons of modernism yet could still serve the public good. The art he wished to create was intent less on autonomy and stasis than on enlightenment and action."

Early Auden followed its subject's career through the eve of his emigration to the United States, in January 1939, with his friend, sometime lover, and occasional collaborator Christopher Isherwood. *Later Auden*[2] picks up the story from there, providing a history and interpretation of Auden's work from 1939 through his death in 1973.

Later Auden is a scrupulous and inviting piece of literary-critical scholarship, crisply written and full of the quiet authority that comes with intimate mastery of a subject. Indeed, I doubt whether anyone can claim greater mastery of the Auden corpus than Professor Mendelson. He began with a doctoral dissertation on Auden. In 1970, when Auden was thinking about putting together a collection of his book reviews and review essays, he found he was unable to remember exactly what he'd written or where. But Professor Mendelson, who had met Auden while working on his thesis, had amassed photocopies of virtually everything. Auden—who was spectacularly disorganized himself—was duly impressed by this display of order (and doubtless by the homage it implied) and entrusted the selection of the volume that became *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973) to him. In 1972, Professor Mendelson was appointed Auden's literary executor (joining William Meredith and Monroe K. Spears), and he has devoted himself to Audeniana ever since. In addition to his critical studies, he is a founding member of the Auden Society. He has also edited almost all of Auden's posthumous works:[3] the last collection of poems, entitled *Thank You, Fog* (1974), *Collected Poems* (1976), *The English Auden: Poems, Essays, and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939* (1977), and the ongoing *Complete Works of W. H. Auden* of which three volumes (plays, libretti, and prose to 1938) have thus far appeared from Princeton University Press. All of which is to say that there is precious little about Auden's work that Professor Mendelson doesn't know.

Although it is half again as long as its predecessor, *Later Auden* does not come with the same kind of interpretative scaffolding. In *Early Auden*, by arguing for the merits of what he called the "civil tradition" of poetry, Professor Mendelson challenged the prevailing critical climate that gave precedence to the Romantic-Modernist tradition with its emphasis on the isolated individual and the autonomy of the work of art. His detailed discussion of Auden's early development was at the same time a brief for the view of poetry—and by implication, the view of society and man's place in it—that Auden came to represent. At bottom, it is an eighteenth-century view, according to which the purpose of art is to delight and instruct.

In *Later Auden*, such larger arguments are more implicit than explicit. In his introduc-

2 *Later Auden*, by Edward Mendelson; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 570 pages, $30.

3 An exception is the aforementioned *Juvenilia: Poems, 1922–1928*, edited by Katherine Bucknell (Princeton University Press, 1994).

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tion, Professor Mendelson lays out various oppositions—between myth and parable, between "the Ariel-dominated poet and the Prospero-dominated poet," between the poem as "verbal *contraption*" (Auden's phrase) and moral artifact—with which Auden's poetry contended. But the text proper is a tightly focused, sometimes almost abrupt, tour of Auden's work from the elegy for Yeats, which was written a few weeks after he arrived in New York, to the "concluding carnival" of his last, chatty poems. As in his earlier volume, Professor Mendelson quietly punctuates his critical narrative with aptly chosen biographical details. While no substitute for a full-fledged biography, this procedure does provide readers with a kind of precis of Auden's movements, activities, and infatuations. Those interested in a fuller account of Auden's life may consult the excellent biography by Humphrey Carpenter (Houghton Mifflin, 1981) and the briefer, more thematic life by Richard Davenport-Hines (Pantheon, 1995).

Early Auden argued for Auden's surpassing greatness ("the most inclusive poet of the twentieth century, its most technically skilled, and its most truthful"); *Later Auden* assumes it. It is revisionist in that it places Auden's later work on a par with, or even ahead of, his early work. Professor Mendelson is far from uncritical; about some poems from the early Forties, for example, he writes that "the contemplative saints briefly but disastrously took over much of his work, and they ruined every poem they touched." But such local criticisms occur in the context of presumed greatness. They tend to underscore the boldness of Professor Mendelson's arresting claim that "much of [Auden's] most profound and personal work was written in the last fifteen years of his life," that is from 1958 on. "Personal" of course it may be; any doodle might be personal. And in fact Auden, who famously declared that he did not want a biography written about him, often noted that his poems were full of coded autobiographical references. "For a poet like myself," he wrote, "an autobiography would be redundant since anything of importance that happens to one is immediately incorporated, however obscurely, in a poem." The task of identifying such references has kept scholars busy for years and is one of the things that makes John Fuller's *Commentary* so valuable. Among other things, he is almost always able to provide the relevant biographical correlative: "Auden wrote this poem while staying at the new Pennsylvania home of Caroline Newman, his patron," "Auden spent the night of 19 January in Paris, *en route* with Isherwood for Marseilles," "The circumstances of this early poem to [his lover, Chester] Kallman are," etc.

But by "profound" Professor Mendelson means artistically significant: not only technically accomplished but also (given Auden's understanding of art) morally wise and aesthetically compelling. Professor Mendelson argues this case passionately and intelligently; whether he argues it convincingly is another matter. There are many ways in which one can trace Auden's poetic development. The road from existential bafflement to religious affirmation charts one course (in 1940, at the age of thirty-three, Auden began "in a tentative and experimental way" to return to the Anglo-Catholic faith of his youth). The movement from lyric isolation to deliberate didacticism marks another. A third path has to do with what we might call diminishing poetic tautness. I do not mean a loss of prosodic virtuosity. Auden's astonishing technical mastery never left him; if anything, he became more facile with age. His stupendous example helped make us more aware of the ways in which technical facility can be the precondition of poetic achievement. It may also have encouraged us to neglect the fact that technique, uncatalyzed by sensibility and subject matter, can be the enemy of poetic achievement. In any event, for Auden technical fluency sometimes resulted in poetry that seemed to proceed on verbal autopilot.

Auden often remarked on his fondness

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for the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In later life, it provided some of his favorite reading matter and indeed was the source of many of the lexical curiosities that—increasingly—bedizened his poetry. Humphrey Carpenter notes that the most prominent object in the workroom of Auden's house in Kirchstetten, Austria (where he summered from 1958 to the end of his life), was the OED. The set, Carpenter writes, would always be "missing one volume, which was downstairs, Auden invariably using it as a cushion to sit on when at table—as if (a friend observed) he were a child not quite big enough for the nursery furniture." Auden's raids on the lexicon resulted in some bewildering rarities. In a review of *Epistle to a Godson* (1972), one critic lists "blouts, pirries, stolchy, glunch, sloomy, snudge, snoachy, scaddle, cagmag, hoasting, drumbles," among others. How many do you know? How many were chosen because the poet felt he had stumbled upon the one absolutely right word for the thought or feeling he was trying to express? How many did he adopt because he happened to pick them up from yesterday's trip through the dictionary and they filled a metrical hole? Auden regularly described poetry as a verbal puzzle, akin to a crossword. Well, it is and it isn't. Not all poems are verbal puzzles—not even all good ones—and it should go without saying that not all verbal puzzles are poems. These are distinctions that some of Auden's later poetry elides.

In 1936, Auden said that "the first, second and third thing in . . . art is subject. Technique follows from and is governed by subject." Possibly he later changed his mind; he certainly changed his practice. Auden's love of complicated verse forms and unusual words was doubtless partly an expression of a poet's delight in the resources of language and his ability to manipulate it skillfully. It may also have been an attempt to compensate for the diminishing tautness I mentioned: an effort to inject arbitrary verbal complexity to distract readers—and even, perhaps, himself—from the lack of genuine poetic density that characterizes so many of his later poems. In this regard, it seems significant that the word "cosy" came to loom large in Auden's vocabulary in later years.

These features of Auden's poetry have not gone unremarked. Already in 1940, reviewing *Another Time*, Randall Jarrell complained that, unlike Auden's early "oracular" verse, the present poems seemed "moral, rational, manufactured, written by the top of the head for the top of the head." Although he was full of generalized compliments about Auden's talent, Jarrell also wrote that "the poems say often now, 'Be good.' They ascend through moral abstractions, gnomic chestnuts, to a vaguish humanitarian mysticism." And this was only 1940. By 1955, when he reviewed *The Shield of Achilles*, Jarrell was resorting to sarcasm: "non-Euclidean needlepoint, a man sitting on a chaise longue juggling four cups, four saucers, four sugar lumps, and the round-square: this is what great and good poets do when they don't bother even to try to write great and good poems."

One of the most devastating reflections on Auden's development—or decline—was Philip Larkin's review of *Homage to Clio* in 1960. Entitled "What's become of Wystan?" (a play on Anthony Powell's novel *What's Become of Waring*), Larkin begins by praising Auden's pre-1940 poetry and proceeds to describe his later verse as "too verbose to be memorable and too intellectual to be moving." Larkin readily acknowledges Auden's large ambition and poetic virtues—"the wide-angled rhetoric, the seamless lyricism, the sudden gripping dramatisations"—but he insists that "almost all we value is still confined to the first ten years" of his career. Auden, he wrote, had "become a reader rather than a writer" with the result that his poetry suffered a "loss of vividness" and "a certain abstract windiness." The "rambling intellectual stew of 'New Year Letter,'" Larkin wrote, "was hardly more than a vamp-till-ready." The poems in *Homage to Clio* were "agreeable and ingenious" but their "poetic pressure is not high." Too often, he mused, readers find "a wilful jum-

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ble of Age-of-Plastic nursery rhyme, ballet folk-lore, and Hollywood Lemprière served up with a lisping archness that sets the teeth on edge." As an example, Larkin quotes this bit from "Plains" (1953), part of Auden's sequence *Bucolics*:

> Romance? Not in this weather. Ovid's charmer
> Who leads in quadrilles in Arcady, boy-lord
> Of hearts who can call their Yes and No
> their own.
> Would, madcap that he is, soon die of cold
> or sunstroke:
> Their lives are in firmer hands; that old grim
> She
> Who makes the blind dates for the hatless
> genera
> Creates their country matters.

Tough as Larkin's review was, it exhibited disappointment as much as hostility. It was with sadness, not malice, that Larkin concluded that Auden, "never a pompous poet, has now become an unserious one" who "no longer touches our imaginations." It speaks extremely well of Auden that, a few months after this review appeared, he wrote about Larkin's first book *The Less Deceived* and, as Professor Mendelson notes, "praised it without reservation."

The tweeness that Larkin discerned in Auden's verse was always a temptation for Auden; it was a temptation he gave into more and more as the years went by. Hence the increasing levity and campiness of Auden's poetry. This was something that Christopher Ricks registered with deadly precision in his review of *About the House* (1965). Professor Ricks begins by describing the "disarming" quality that much of Auden's poetry displays; he then goes on to note that it is "harder to pinpoint the moment at which such a word has to be said accusingly rather than thankfully." Consider, for example, the prominence of the word "silly" in Auden's poetic vocabulary (e.g., from the elegy on Yeats: "You were silly like us.") As Professor Ricks points out, Auden doubtless expected his readers to recall the etymology of "silly" ("blessed," "fortunate"), but the line depends mostly on the word's deflationary effect: a confidential, homey effect that can easily be overplayed. Increasingly, Auden did overplay it. Consider the lines that Professor Ricks quotes from "Grub First, Then Ethics" (1958):

> surely those in whose creed
> God is edible may call a fine
> omelette a Christian deed.

At best, this is silly in the modern sense: "showing a lack of good sense," "frivolous." The fact that Auden wrote not to ridicule but out of professed commitment to Christian doctrine makes the poem in even more questionable taste.

Taste is the lodestar of art, the inner principle that accounts for the decorum of the appropriately said. Increasingly, Auden's faculty of taste functioned accurately only in a risible or mocking mode. Given the right subject and the right form, he could be very funny. He was, for example, a master of the clerihew: "No one could ever inveigle/ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel/ Into offering the slightest apology/ For his *Phenomenology*." Or: "Mallarmé /Had too much to say: / He could never quite/ Leave the paper white." But he had difficulty purging his poetry of that superciliousness. As Professor Ricks points out, this shows itself with lamentable consequences in his habit of irregular capitalization: "A Major Prophet taken Short," "a Perfect social Number," etc. The effect is unsettling, and ultimately unserious. Exactly how, Professor Ricks asks, does it differ from A. A. Milne's procedure with Winnie the Pooh: "A Good Hum, such as is Hummed Hopefully to Others"?

This family of criticisms is broached even by some of Auden's most stalwart admirers. In the 1940s and 1950s, Edmund Wilson became a staunch booster of Auden. He concluded his long tribute, "W. H. Auden in America" (1956), by describing him as "a great English poet who is also . . . one of the great English men of the world." Nearly

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twenty years earlier, however, Wilson put his finger on another dimension of Auden's sensibility: "W. H. Auden has presented the curious spectacle of a poet with an original language . . . whose development has seemed to be arrested at the mentality of an adolescent schoolboy." There is no doubt that Auden's poetry developed; the question is whether it can really be said to have matured. The quality that, in their different ways, Wilson, Jarrell, Larkin, and Ricks dilate on has to do with a precociousness that never outgrew itself. In later years, Auden took to referring to himself as "mother," especially in relation to the monumentally irresponsible Chester Kallman. (Although they were lovers only briefly, Auden supported Kallman for the rest of his life and the two periodically lived together.) More telling and finally more appropriate was the nickname Auden acquired at Oxford: "The Child." The coyness and prolixity that characterize Auden's later poetry are emblematic of what happens when the desire for perpetual adolescence fails to outgrow itself: it becomes seedy. It is shocking, as one looks back over Auden's poetic oeuvre, to note how early the seediness set in.

Auden memorably defined poetry as "memorable speech." How well does his own poetry do by this criterion? Auden certainly said and wrote some memorable things. His comment that Rilke was "the greatest lesbian poet since Sappho" may be described as unforgettable. Likewise his comment that his face, which in later years was ravaged by the thick furrows of Touraine-Solents-Gole syndrome, was "like a wedding cake left out in the rain." The widely memorable lines from his poetry are almost exclusively from poems written, as Larkin observed, from the first decade of his career. They also tend to be fragmentary: a line here, two or three lines there. "Lay your sleeping head my love/ Human on my faithless arm" from "Lullaby" (1937); "About suffering they were never wrong,/ The Old Masters" from "Musée des Beaux Arts" (1938); "In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise" from the Yeats elegy (1939), which also appears as the epitaph on Auden's memorial stone in Westminster Abbey; "sad is Eros, builder of cities,/ And weeping anarchic Aphrodite" from the elegy for Freud (1939).

It is ironical that what is probably Auden's single most famous poem, "September 1, 1939," was one that he disavowed and even, as he put in 1957, came to "loathe." Nevertheless, the poem contains some of Auden's most memorable poetry, from the ominous opening lines,

> I sit in one of the dives
> On Fifty-Second Street
> Uncertain and afraid
> As the clever hopes expire
> Of a low dishonest decade

to the famous end of the eighth stanza: "We must love one another or die." As Professor Mendelson points out, "this line was more widely quoted and admired than perhaps anything else" in Auden's work. E. M. Forster said that because Auden had written it, "he can command me to follow him." Which doubtless tells us a lot about Forster.

In any event, Auden soon had misgivings about the poem. In 1944, he abandoned the celebrated eighth stanza partly because he believed that in the context of the poem ("Hunger allows no choice/ To the citizen or the police") the line about love reduced what should be a voluntary act to an instinctual drive like hunger. In 1964, Auden's dislike of the poem hardened into revulsion when an advertising consultant for Lyndon Johnson misappropriated the line in an infamous campaign commercial. As Richard Davenport-Hines reports in his biography, the commercial featured a little girl counting the petals of a flower; suddenly, she is interrupted by a stern male voice counting down from ten to zero, at which point the girl is replaced by the flash of an explosion and a mushroom cloud. Then Johnson's voice intoned: "These are the stakes: to make a world in which all of God's children can live, or go into the dark. We must love

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each other or we must die." Auden bitterly responded, "I pray to God that I shall never be memorable like that again." When he prepared his *Collected Shorter Poems* for publication the following year, he omitted the poem and later gave instructions that it was not to be reprinted in his lifetime.

Most readers will be able to cite a few other lines or poems—"At the Grave of Henry James" (1941), for example, with the beginning of its stern last stanza: "All will be judged." But after around 1940, most readers will find that the gems are fewer and farther between. It is sad that among Auden's later poems, one of the most memorable is the last verse he ever wrote, an often-reproduced haiku:

> He still loves life
> but O O O O how he wishes
> the Good Lord would take him.

(As Professor Mendelson points out, the "O"s need to be elided to keep the haiku to the requisite seventeen syllables; but should they be read as three syllables, as he says, or two, as I suspect?) In the end, Auden's poetry has produced relatively faint echoes. He was a remarkable mimic; he did marvelous impersonations of seriousness; but his continual worries about the authenticity of his poems show that even in his own mind he did not transcend impersonation. In comparison, say, to the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Auden's poetry lacks density. His example has meant a great deal to several poets who came after him; his techniques are preserved in the practice of some of the best. But Auden's poetry has left indifferent traces on the sensibility of our epoch. It is accomplished, not ineluctable. Reverberations from "Prufrock," *The Wasteland*, "Gerontion," and *The Four Quartets* are everywhere: the meter and the matter of those poems are part of the poetic metabolism of the age. Auden wrote nothing that has entered our pulses so thoroughly.

The permanent Auden is found elsewhere, above all in the scintillating and companionable essays of *The Dyer's Hand* (1962), *Forewords and Afterwords*, and some of his lectures, especially *The Enchafèd Flood* (1949) and parts of *Secondary Worlds* (1968). He was always penetrating on literary subjects. His essay on Trollope in *Forewords and Afterwords* is a masterpiece. So is his essay on Shakespeare's sonnets. As in the scenario he described in "Musée des Beaux Arts," his essays hail the triumph and consolation of the ordinary in the face of the extraordinary. In the poem, "the expensive delicate ship" saw "something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky," but it had somewhere to go and "sailed calmly on." One of Auden's most salutary services was to remind us of the importance of sailing calmly on.

Auden wrote often and well about the contradictory desire to find in art both an escape from and a revelation of reality. In an essay on Robert Frost, he observed that "we want a poem to be beautiful, that is to say, a verbal earthly paradise, a timeless world of pure play, which gives us delight precisely because of its contrast to our historical existence with all its insoluble problems and inescapable suffering; at the same time we want a poem to be true, that is to say, to provide us with some kind of revelation about our life which will show us what life is really like and free us from self-enchantment and deception, and a poet cannot bring us any truth without introducing into his poetry the problematic, the painful, the disorderly, the ugly." Auden was especially effective in his admonitory mode, warning about hubris of art absolutized. "Poetry," he wrote in *The Dyer's Hand*, "is not magic. In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate." Later on in that volume, he expands on this thought. The effect of formal beauty, he writes, is "evil to the degree that beauty is taken, not as analogous to, but identical with goodness, so that the artist regards himself or is regarded by others as God, the pleasure of beauty being taken for the joy of Paradise, and the conclusion drawn that, since all is well in the work of art, all is well in history." Poetry, Auden said

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in the elegy for Yeats, "makes nothing happen." Many of his essays expatiate on the mischief of trying to have it otherwise.

Auden's essays are rich and endlessly rewarding. Yet in them, too, there is a large element of impersonation. In "Reading," the opening essay of *The Dyer's Hand*, Auden remarks that "in literature, as in life, affectation, passionately adopted and loyally persevered in, is one of the chief forms of self-discipline by which mankind has raised itself by its own bootstraps." This is undoubtedly true, though not necessarily reassuring. It is also true, as Auden remarks a few pages later, that "some writers confuse authenticity, which they ought always to aim at, with originality, which they should never bother about." Authenticity and affectation are not opposites, exactly, but if they can co-exist, they must do so uneasily. Auden never really resolved such tensions; he exploited them. The beguiling urbanity of Auden's essays depends partly on his native brilliance and erudition, partly on what we might call his air of easygoing religious seriousness. He never simply reviewed a book, he made it part of an existential project. He managed to do this whether he was writing about Kierkegaard, migraines, or M. F. K. Fisher's *The Art of Eating*.

Auden was fond of quoting Yeats's line about being forced to choose between perfection of the life and perfection of the work. He early on chose the latter. "Charade" is too strong a word. But there is a startling disjunction in Auden between the avuncular moralist who has such remarkable things to say about art, pride, sin, self-deception, etc., and the disheveled, lickerish narcissist who habitually besotted himself with horrifying quantities of alcohol, benzedrine, and some fifteen-thousand cigarettes yearly, who talked about being "married" to the disreputable Chester Kallman and then diverted himself with a steady procession of call-boys. George Orwell retracted his description of Auden as "a sort of gutless Kipling," but not, I believe, his comment from 1940 (soon after Auden absented himself from the perils of war-threatened England) that "Mr. Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled." Auden later wrote to the British embassy offering to do "anything when and if the Government ask me," but he oughtn't have been surprised to find his offer rebuffed. Auden mounted a campaign against an overly aestheticized view of the world, but he did so while remaining within the orbit of aestheticism. His anguish was no doubt genuine, but his solution always had something of a performance about it. This is not to say that it lacked pathos. In a sermon he delivered in Westminster Abbey in 1966, Auden poignantly observed that

> those of us who have the nerve to call ourselves Christians will do well to be extremely reticent on the subject. Indeed, it is almost the definition of a Christian that he is somebody who *knows* he isn't one, either in faith or morals. Where faith is concerned, very few of us have the right to say more than—to vary a saying of Simone Weil's—"I believe in a God who is like the True God in everything except that he does not exist, for I have not yet reached the point where God exists." As for loving and forgiving our enemies, the less we say about that the better. Our lack of faith and love are facts we have to acknowledge, but we shall not improve either by a morbid and essentially narcissistic moaning over our deficiencies. Let us rather ask, with caution and humour—given our time and place and talents, what, if our faith and love were perfect, would we be glad to find it obvious to do?

Referring to Christianity, G. K. Chesterton once said that anything worth doing is worth doing badly. It is a witty statement, partly true. But only partly. In both his art and his life, W. H. Auden leaned heavily on the resources of the subjunctive, even as he entertained his readers with dreams of indicative truth. When he was eight years old, his mother taught him the love duet from *Tristan*. Auden played Isolde. It is not clear that he ever ceased giving that performance.

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How did Dostoevsky know?

by Gary Saul Morson

If the intellectuals in the plays of Chekhov who spent all their time guessing what would happen in twenty, thirty, or forty years had been told that in forty years interrogation by torture would be [routinely] practiced in Russia; that prisoners would have their skulls squeezed within iron rings; that a human being would be lowered into an acid bath; that they would be trussed up naked to be bitten by ants and bedbugs; that a ramrod heated over a primus stove would be thrust up their anal canal ("the secret brand"); that a man's genitals would be slowly crushed beneath the toe of a jackboot; and that, in the luckiest possible of circumstances, prisoners would be tortured by being kept from sleeping for a week, by thirst, and by being beaten to a bloody pulp, not one of Chekhov's plays would have gotten to its end because all the heroes would have gone off to an insane asylum.
—Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

At this point, it is safe to say that the twentieth century is the bloodiest on record. By the most conservative estimates, at least one hundred million people were killed by Communist regimes. The largest number of deaths were, of course, Chinese and Soviet—to the point where the million or so executed by the Khmer Rouge are well within the margin of error for the total. And of course these figures do not include the Nazi murders and other tragedies of stupefying proportions. If the twenty-first century is to be any better, it might pay to examine why our age has so outstripped the achievements of Nero, Ivan the Terrible, and the Spanish Inquisition.

The question arises: why has the horror of our times not provoked more intelligent reflection? In fact, why are some campaigns that took millions of lives almost totally unknown except to a few specialists? I can think of no more urgent questions to ask as the century draws to a close.

At the end of their celebrated dramatization of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett have the voice of Anne pronounce what they take to be the moral of the story: "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart." In his study of the play, Lawrence Graver observes,

> In her diary, Anne Frank followed that sentence with an apocalyptic vision of "the ever approaching thunder," destruction, and "the suffering of millions." But in the play one is left as the curtain falls with the sanguine, reassuring observation about human goodness—a repeated utterance so mindfully placed and so resonant that it soon became a tag line summing up the message of the *Diary* for countless people around the world. Indeed, so famous is the closing scene of the play that many people—including the editors of the *Oxford Companion to the American Theater* (1992) and the *Cambridge Guide to American Theater* (1993)—mistakenly believe the line affirming human goodness is actually the last line of Anne's own diary.

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In the play, the famous line has real finality, but when Anne wrote it in her diary, it displayed the experimental quality one might expect of a sensitive teenager testing possible responses to horror. She wonders what to make of it all and advances incompatible ideas to see if any might be persuasive. This "little bundle of contradictions," as she calls herself, is always *testing* ideas and feelings, "searching" and "trying it out."

We appreciate youthful idealism in all its attractiveness and limitation, but we also sense that she entertains very different thoughts as well. Anne reflects that even with countless Jews being taken away to concentration camps, those in hiding still occupy themselves with petty quarrels and trivial vanity. "I keep asking myself, whether one would have trouble in the long run, whoever one shared a house with. Or did we strike it extra unlucky? Are most people so selfish and stingy then? I think it's all to the good to have learned a bit about human beings, but now I think I've learned enough." Anne's thoughts about the human essence reel from extreme to extreme, because, as she knows, she is still learning, indulging a passionate curiosity open to revision.

Anne states that the horrors of the war and mass murder cannot be blamed only on the politicians, but must also be attributed to evil in human nature itself.

> I don't believe that the big men, the politicians and the capitalists alone, are guilty of the war. Oh no, the little man is just as guilty, otherwise the peoples of the world would have risen in revolt long ago! There's in people simply an urge to destroy, an urge to kill, to murder and rage, and until all mankind, without exception, undergoes a great change, wars will be waged, everything that has been built up, cultivated, and grown will be destroyed and disfigured, after which mankind will have to begin all over again.

But since despair only makes things worse, Anne continues, she will try to regard her life as a "great adventure" and to "treat all the privations as amusing."

Experience tells us that human nature is capable of great evil, but Anne's sheer vitality, the beautiful natural world she can see through darkened windows, and her own love of high ideals, all make her want to assert goodness she cannot really believe in. In the entry for July 15, 1944, she refers to the "half-completed task" of knowing who she is and what to think. "Older people have formed their opinions about everything" and are impervious to evidence, but the young are still open.

> [A]fter a long time, we think we've found a solution, but the solution doesn't seem able to resist the facts which reduce it to nothing again. That's the difficulty in these times: ideals, dreams, and cherished hopes rise within us, only to meet the horrible truth and be shattered.
>
> It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquillity will return to earth.

I hope it is clear that to tear the famous affirmation out of context is to distort it. Anne sees how all the facts refute ideals, destroy dreams, show the evil of people: but she still tries to cling to ideals because otherwise life would be impossible.

We love Anne for trying out her idealistic thought, even if we sense the full pathos of its falsity in light of what she has herself described, in spite of her entertaining the opposite thought, and in spite of her eventual fate, necessarily unknown to her. After

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all, this is a real diary, not a work of fiction; nothing has been placed here to exploit the irony of a girl who is to die at Bergen-Belsen still imagining her future after the war and still clinging to hope, not only personal but also metaphysical. The diary's ironies belong not to the author, but to history, and much of the power of this book comes from its utter authenticity, from the fact that its very existence as a book happened by sheer chance. Anne had good reason to think that the Nazis would arrest her but almost no reason to anticipate that they would unaccountably leave her diary behind, that her Dutch protectors would save it, and that her father would publish it.

Everything changes in the play. The authors of the script, the director Garson Kanin, the producer Kermit Bloomgarden, and Lillian Hellman, who was active in all aspects of the production and who guided the Hacketts (Goodrich and Hackett were married) through eight drafts, have left a heavy imprint of their vision on the whole, a vision at great variance from Anne's. Anne searches, but they know the truth, and they have often fabricated words for "Anne" not only to utter it, but also to utter it with a finality completely foreign to her. Anne becomes a spokesman for a truism, which, given her deep quest for authenticity and her own identity, constitutes a loathsome irony. She's been used.

The audience is led to believe that the drama merely places the diary on stage, that this is Anne as she presents herself. The play insists on its authenticity. Brooks Atkinson's introduction to its published text affirms that the Hacketts have met the "heavy obligation to represent her truthfully," and the stage directions constantly mention real specific places and events as if to show that, even if machine gun fire in the background would be a cheap melodramatic effect in a work of fiction, this is no fiction! Audiences do not see this Anne the way they see, let us say, Macbeth, who may or may not resemble the real Macbeth. In this, they are systematically misled. There is a real dishonesty here, all the more obscene because it abuses for propagandistic purposes a real person who cannot protest—along with the millions she is supposed to represent, who become mere ideological cannon fodder.

It is clear that some of those involved knew just what they were doing. The creation of the play was shaped by the desire for financial profit and by ideology. Truthfulness was beside the point, even though claims to be telling the truth were repeatedly made, since truth, or the impression of it, is also marketable. Years later, when her various books of memoirs were attacked as thoroughly inaccurate, Hellman was to say, in an anticipation of current literary theory: "in the three books of memoirs I wrote I tried very hard for truth. . . . But the truth as I saw it, of course, doesn't have much to do with the truth." "Nothing is true altogether," she wrote, "nor does it matter." Mary McCarthy famously commented on the Dick Cavett Show that Hellman was a "dishonest writer" whose "every word is a lie including 'and' and 'the.'"

The Hacketts had made their career in Hollywood before being tapped by Hellman and Bloomgarden to do the dramatization. Their most famous script was—I am not making this up—*It's a Wonderful Life*. It is as if they, alone or with Hellman's help, imagined the same title for the staged diary. The play's director (to whom the published version is also dedicated) compared Anne to—I am not making this up either—Peter Pan and the Mona Lisa. Anne, he said, "remains forever adolescent. . . . Anne lives on. She remains forever a shining star, a radiant presence who, during her time of terror and humiliation and imprisonment, was able to find it within herself to write in her immortal diary, 'in spite of everything I still believe that people are good at heart.'" And ever she be chaste, and he be fair: it's a sort of ode to the Nazi urn. Hannah Arendt was appalled by what she called "the cheap sentimentality" of the way in which Anne Frank was understood, and Bruno Bettelheim, himself imprisoned by the Nazis in Dachau and Buchenwald, remarked that the

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play's famous line makes it easy to forget real horror. "If all men are good," he concluded, "there was never an Auschwitz."

In discussions of the play, much has been made of Hellman's Stalinism. Hellman defended the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 and, while that pact was in force, opposed the immigration of Jews to the United States. The journal she kept during a trip to Russia in 1944 dismissed persecution of Jews as the fantasy of "Jewish shopkeepers during a pogrom rumor," a remarkable comment: Jewish *shopkeepers*? Even after Nikita Khrushchev's speech on "The Crimes of the Stalin Era," Hellman defended Stalin as "the watchdog of Party orthodoxy." Later she justified Stalin's purges as "the necessity of a tight reign after any revolution," although the Great Purge did not begin until 1936. The late Forties and early Fifties were the period of Stalin's intense campaign against "rootless cosmopolitans," that is, Jews. The campaign culminated first in the summoning of all prominent Yiddish writers to Moscow, where they were shot en masse, and then in the Doctor's Plot, in which Jewish Kremlin doctors were accused of deliberately mistreating high officials. Plans were prepared for mass pogroms and for the exile of all (remaining) Jews to Siberia. Stalin's sudden death in 1953 aborted the plans.

The usual interpretation of Hellman's influence on the play has been that she transformed the diary by universalizing it. Anne herself is made to say, as she does not in her diary, that "We're not the only people that've had to suffer. Sometimes one race . . . sometimes another." This argument about Hellman seems persuasive, but another connection between her beliefs and the play has been mentioned much less frequently, probably because, in this respect, Hollywood sentimentality and Communist philosophy coincide.

According to Soviet literary doctrine, tragedy—the whole genre—is a lie. Only optimistic visions of the world can coincide with the promise of utopia. For the same reason, endings in Soviet literature had to be "positive," or the writer would face one of the most fatal—I use the word advisedly—condemnations: pessimism. All problems have solutions, and each solution is known. History's destined happy ending must be reflected in plots. Above all, humanity is essentially good, and there is nothing like original sin: evil results from the class structure, and will, in its entirety, disappear along with it.

In the play about Anne Frank, the famous affirmation in fact appears twice. In the next to last scene—the final one set while Anne is still alive—Anne contests Peter's despairing refusal to believe in anything. This is when Anne says: "We're not the only people that've had to suffer. There've always been people that've had to . . . sometimes one race . . . sometimes another." Peter suggests that a history of racial prejudice only makes things worse, because if such suffering has always existed, then doubtless it always will. "Anne" replies: "I think the world may be going through a phase, the way I was with Mother. It'll pass, maybe not for hundreds of years, but some day. . . . I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart."

"Going through a phase, the way I was with Mother": the debate over whether the Hacketts were right to invent words for Anne that made of the Holocaust just another chapter in the history of prejudice has been so intense that another important point has been overlooked. They make Anne say, as she does not in the diary, that the Nazi Holocaust is an adolescent trauma. Indeed, the whole growing-up theme, so important in the play, is thereby transformed into a historical allegory. Humanity will outgrow evil, as surely as an individual will pass through puberty. All human history has been a phase in the development of the universe, which, right after her affirmation, "Anne" evokes as a "great pattern" in which human lives are but "a little minute in the life [of nature]. . . . Look at the sky, isn't it lovely?" When this phase ends, humanity will reveal its essential goodness.

Historical optimism has never displayed

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worse taste. If Voltaire were writing *Candide, or Optimism* in the mid-twentieth century, he might have directed it against silliness like this. The word "phase" allows all the contrary evidence of history to be dismissed. Its use here not only adds to the real diary, but contradicts it. The real Anne resents the grown-ups for their condescension: they fail to take her seriously when they dimiss her feelings as a "phase."

Of course, one does not have to be a Communist to maintain a thoroughly optimistic anthropology. Primitivism, Rousseauism, anarchism, and kindred other theories are equally fatuous. As Hollywood has a habit of telling us: it's a wonderful life! We are surrounded by what Graver has called "the kitsch of hope." This play's ending is worse than kitschy; it is a violation of an important truth that the Nazi experience illustrates as well as anything else in history. If Auschwitz stands for anything, it is the horrible things that people are capable of. From Dostoevsky to James Baldwin, writers have observed that sentimentality is often a mask for cruelty. Here one wonders: is the Hacketts' Panglossian affirmation of goodness "in spite of everything" part of a refusal to learn from experience, as such assertions are in Voltaire? What if that refusal contributes to its repetition?

Neither the Hacketts nor Hellman was a particularly original thinker, and the very fact that the play was successfully calculated to appeal to a mass audience, and eventually won a Pulitzer Prize, indicates that we are not dealing with an idiosyncratic reaction. No, the play succeeds because it is so skillfully hackneyed, such a perfect example of what Nabokov called *poshlost*: pseudo-profound vulgarity. Evil exists, yes, and the heroine dies, but *her words live on*, she achieves immortality, goodness is affirmed, and we are its witnesses. George Stevens's preface to the diary begins: "Of all the most remarkable things about Anne Frank, I believe the most important is her survival." No: she died along with countless others in Bergen-Belsen. Apart from Stevens's almost sick deification of words as opposed to real life, what about the words of all those people who left no diaries? Or who did not have them published by Doubleday and staged on Broadway? Contrast this comment with Solzhenitsyn's inscription to *The Gulag Archipelago*: "I dedicate this to all who did not live to tell it. And may they please forgive me for not having seen it all nor remembered it all, for not having divined it all."

The bloody experience of the twentieth century reflects its most influential invention, more influential, I think, than any scientific or technological one: the totalitarian state. So often has the evil of our time been attributed to technology that it is worth mentioning how little was involved in most killing. In Nazi-occupied Russia, a very small number of SS soldiers were able to kill hundreds of thousands of Jews without any diabolical invention. One common method, for instance, was to force Jews to dig a ditch, tie them together in front of it, shoot a few of them—bullets were to be saved—and then watch them all fall in, after which the bodies were buried, dead or alive. This is technology that Peter the Great could have used. The same observation applies to the Cambodian killing fields and to Stalin's Gulag. No computers or lasers were at hand. The *social* technology is what really allowed for unprecedented horror.

The Russian tsars were traditionally the most repressive rulers in Europe, but one only needs to meditate on what tsarist absolutism meant in practice to see the difference between it and totalitarianism. Tolstoy, struck with horror at tsarist political executions, once calculated that in the past hundred years some three thousand people had been executed for political reasons. If one makes a similar calculation for the Soviet period from 1917 to the death of Stalin in 1953, three thousand people lost their lives on average *every two or three days*. Stalin admired Ivan the Terrible, but by comparison his idol resembles Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.

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In the West, the most famous example of Stalinist mass murder is probably the "Great Purge" of 1936–38, in which some four million people died. Lenin may be considered the most effective social innovator of our times because he created, and Stalin then perfected, three interrelated novelties: the one-party state (a *party* used to mean, as its etymology indicates, a part); totalitarian controls; and the terrorized society. Unlike Germany, where most non-Jewish people who went about their business and supported the regime could be reasonably sure of not being arrested, in Russia literally no one but Stalin was safe. Terror was directed not only at opponents, class enemies, and unfavored ethnic groups, but also at the population in general, with arrests often entirely random.

A terrorized society and party were unlikely to challenge absolute power. The regime made Pavlik Morozov, who denounced his own parents, a national hero, and people turned in their neighbors out of conviction, spite, and a desire for their apartments. Tsarist Russia could not compare. In his memoirs, the Russian revolutionary Alexander Herzen reports on his sentence of exile to a Siberian town—not to a prison—where he was put to work for the local officialdom; one of his assignments was to write the reports on the local political exiles, including himself! As Solzhenitsyn reports in *The Gulag Archipelago*, the prison to which Dostoevsky was sent and which he novelized in *The House of The Dead* was regarded by Soviet camp inmates as a paradise.

As important as the Great Purge was, it is exceeded in brutality by the "war on the countryside" in the late 1920s and early 1930s. That war unfolded in three phases, which together took about fourteen million lives, that is, as many as all of World War I in Europe. In the first phase, the so-called "kulaks" were liquidated: in theory, a kulak was a peasant richer than others but in practice the definition also included anyone who might (not "did") oppose collectivization. Collectivization was the third phase.

It was the second phase that provokes particular horror. It took place after all the kulaks had supposedly been eliminated, that is, when the population was theoretically loyal. It is known, for good reason, as the terror famine. A large region of the country, mostly in the bread-basket Ukraine, was sealed off and all food was confiscated. Mass starvation took place. Trains passing through the region had their windows sealed so that travelers could not throw food to the emaciated peasants, and well-fed Bolshevik officers were stationed to make sure no food got through.

By the most widely accepted estimates, some seven million people starved to death during the terror famine. I ask you to imagine the slow starvation of a whole family and what that would mean; it is not surprising that stories of cannibalism were reported. Drivers of death carts took the dying as well as the dead, and children crying for help were thrown on the piles of corpses. If Anne Frank could have witnessed those Bolshevik famine enforcers, would she still have affirmed the goodness of human nature? Would the Hacketts and Hellman?

Hellman, as I have pointed out, did justify Stalin's purges. If one has an ideology, one can always find a reason. Solzhenitsyn asks why Macbeth could only kill a few people whereas Hitler and Stalin could kill millions, and he answers: ideology. When, during the East Bloc's campaign against the Jews, several Czech Jewish Communists were put on show-trial, Jean-Paul Sartre was asked why, as the author of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, he did not condemn Communist anti-Semitism. He replied that he did not want to confuse the French working class by criticizing Communists. Notice the condescension here. The people are simple and must be instructed with a selective truth, while victims of horror will be mentioned only if they serve that truth. Some corpses are more equal than others.

In the United States, the person who most shaped the intelligentsia's views on the

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terror famine was Walter Duranty, for two decades *The New York Times* Moscow correspondent. The winner of a Pulitzer Prize for reporting, and long regarded as the "dean" of American journalists, the British-born Duranty was the one who popularized an apology for Stalinism: you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. Duranty used it repeatedly in his reporting and, believe it or not, in a lyric poem about Russia. The saying rapidly became proverbial in the American leftist press. It is curious how intellectuals imagine themselves as the chefs and others as the raw food. Reporting on the show trials, Duranty insisted that the confessions of top Communists that they spied for the Japanese and Germans were sincere; and he justified the purges of millions as getting rid of a Fifth Column of foreign spies that, he asserted, genuinely existed.

If this were true, why had the Soviet state produced more foreign spies than are recorded in all the annals of history? In Duranty's words, the Soviet experiment embodied a noble idea: "that human nature is plastic, that the life-ways of nations or individuals can be turned into fresh channels, that the new and unknown may successfully replace the old and familiar, in short, that environment is everything and heredity nothing." History is a phase.

Duranty at first denied the famine, then minimized it and attributed it to disease and peasant sabotage. "The 'famine' is mostly bunk," he wrote, and any talk of it is "sheer absurdity." Some headlines given to his articles in the *Times* about collectivization tell the story: "Soviet Is Winning Faith of Peasants," "Members Enriched in Soviet Commune," "Abundance Found in North Caucasus." And yet Duranty and others knew better. That implacable curmudgeon Malcolm Muggeridge, who came to the USSR with the intention of adopting Soviet citizenship, saw the famine and reported on it, but his wife's aunt, the prominent socialist Beatrice Webb, referred to his articles as "a hysterical tirade" and he soon found it difficult to get work. Beatrice Webb also convinced another eyewitness, Andrew Cairns, not to write about what he had seen. Duranty himself knew that what he was reporting was untrue: in a secret report to the British embassy, he estimated casualties in the millions. But when another reporter, Gareth Jones, reported the man-made famine, Duranty met with several Moscow reporters, along with a Soviet official, who all agreed to call Jones a liar. Duranty took the lead in doing so.

A nice question arises. Duranty lied, but did Beatrice Webb actually disbelieve the famine reports? On what basis did she deny eyewitness accounts? Or was she pulling a Sartre, that is, deciding that the information, even if true, should not be read by common people lest they draw the wrong conclusions? Anyone who has trouble understanding Holocaust revisionists might consider Beatrice Webb, if that is easier, as a first step.

Duranty's biographer, S. T. Taylor, paints a more or less sympathetic portrait of Duranty the man, but she points out that had Duranty reported the truth, he might not have been ignored, as Jones and Muggeridge were. "The Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33 remains the greatest man-made disaster ever recorded, exceeding in scale even the Jewish Holocaust of the next decade," she reminds us. To be sure, the Bolsheviks did not perform medical experiments on the living or use their bodies as raw material, but dipping people in acid baths and making millions starve to death are certainly horrifying enough. Taylor observes that the total number of words in the French, British, Canadian, and American press devoted to the famine were outnumbered by famine deaths 140 to 1.

Duranty is long dead, and scholars have documented the facts. Why then are they so unknown to the American intelligentsia? I can tell you from experience that the mere mention of them provokes references to "red-baiting." Why? These are people who properly react with revulsion to Holocaust revisionism and who regard all attempts at

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apology as post-facto complicity in the crime. How can they not see they are doing the same thing? Why is Holocaust revisionism unacceptable but what might be called Gulag revisionism acceptable? Duranty, like Anne Frank, is somehow a representative figure of our times.

One reason that the terror famine is not widely known is the intelligentsia's congenital leftism, its anti-anti-Communism. But there are other, more interesting reasons, including a complex of ideas of which the "Anne Frank thesis" forms a crucial part. Consider a remarkable paradox of modern thought. On the one hand, we live in the century that began with the rediscovery of Mendel's experiments, at its midpoint mapped the double helix, and at its close has begun to develop new drugs by genetic engineering and has cloned animals. On the other hand, the governing orthodoxy in anthropology and in literary studies has long been that everything is cultural and nothing is innate or natural. "Human nature is plastic," as Duranty wrote, and to say otherwise is to be guilty of the cardinal sin now known as "essentialism." Margaret Mead, radical cultural relativism, the idea that everything is a "construct"—all these form an orthodoxy. If one suggests that nature and nurture must both be active and interactive, one risks a lot. To be sure, the abuse of pseudo-genetics by the Nazis and in American immigration policy explains part of this blindness, but anthropologists have not become creationists because Darwinism generated social Darwinism. Something else is involved.

Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, who offers a catalogue of horrifying child abuse cases, asks whether such evil "is a matter [just] of people's bad qualities, or whether it is inherent in their nature." How deep does the propensity for evil go? Is there original sin, as Augustine maintained, or are we capable of living a perfect life, as Augustine's opponent Pelagius contended? All utopians, whether Communist, anarchist, or any other, are virtually by definition Pelagians of some sort, whereas those with a tragic vision are, in some way, Augustinians. Genetics resonates because it sounds like original sin stated in scientific terms, which is precisely why Lysenkoism, which denied modern genetics, was adopted in the Soviet Union. The current literary-critical superstition that everything is a construct constitutes a sophisticated Lysenkoism. Indeed, in separating humanity from the traces of evolution that affect all other creatures, it constitutes a sort of atheistic creationism.

Thus also the appeal of various forms of primitivism that suggest that evil is not inherent. Think, for instance, of the repeated attempts to idealize the Third World and to attribute whatever ills exist there to colonialism. Could not some of their brutality to each other be of their own making? In such discussions, you will hear no mention of Ethiopia, the only African country never successfully colonialized but which, under the Marxist regime of Mengistu, repeated the Soviet collectivization experiment at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. We are back to cultural sentimentality. From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the Hacketts' *Anne Frank* and beyond, victims must be childlike and virtuous. As Michael André Bernstein observed of the Hollywoodization of the Holocaust in *Schindler's List*, "only by being completely pure can they [the victims] function as appropriate objects of our sympathy. . . . [But] moral lessons need moral density." Why cannot the oppressed be fully human, vicious as well as virtuous? There is a danger here, for at some point one is bound to discover that victims are *not* all good. Who is? Should they then lose their claim on our sympathy? Sentimentality leads to cruelty, and the wrong view of cultural diversity to intolerance.

Two complementary ideas have, more than anything, shaped the twentieth-century disasters. One is essential human goodness, along with its corollary, the infinite malleability of human nature and society if only the right people do the hammering. The second idea is that the right people are

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the intelligentsia, who possess the virtue and, above all, the right theory for transforming society. I call this idea "intelligentsialism," and it, too, has a few interesting corollaries.

First, whereas the beliefs of other groups are held to be distorted by their social interests, the intelligentsia sees itself as standing above particular interests and therefore possessed of greater understanding. The classic formulation of this idea belongs to Karl Mannheim, who seems to have been unaware of the epilogue to *War and Peace*: Tolstoy insists that if we have theories claiming that history is made by great thinkers, but we have no theories saying it is made by shoemakers and craftsmen, this is only because shoemakers don't publish theories. The ideas and values of intellectuals are shaped as much by their interests and way of life as are those of other people. But when have you ever heard anybody but a curmudgeon apply the concept of "false consciousness" to the governing ideas of the intelligentsia? In the fashionable approach called the sociology of knowledge (in literary studies, it goes by various names), one shows how the ideas of other times and groups were shaped by interests they did not acknowledge; but cannot this debunking be applied to the debunkers themselves? Why does the sociology of knowledge almost always mean the sociology of other people's knowledge?

Implicit in the intelligentsia's claim to greater understanding is the claim that they have achieved a high level of certainty in their ideas for improving society. That is why they so often prescribe radical and irreversible measures in their efforts to transform society. Historically, this idea goes back to the seventeenth-century dream that what Newton had achieved for knowledge of the physical world, someone else will for the social world: the dream of a social science that inspired Condorcet, Bentham, Marx, Bronislaw Malinowski, and countless others. Tolstoy called this dream a mere "superstition," designed to flatter the intelligentsia itself. Dostoevsky and Orwell understood that power derives not from the actual possession of such a certain theory but from the claim to possess it.

A third corollary of intelligentsialism is the belief that absolute power is justified to create the perfect world and save the people, even if it means that the people themselves will suffer untold casualties. This idea has by no means been confined to Communist omelette chefs. It had special appeal to artists, who in effect wanted to make the world into a sublime art work. It is now a commonplace among Russian specialists that most of the artistic groups suppressed by Stalin were no less totalitarian than he was.

Le Corbusier described the situation the planner requires for the good of society: "Once his calculations are finished, he is in a position to say—and he does say: *It shall be thus!*" Is it any wonder that an ideology promising such power and prestige to an intelligentsia should so appeal to it? When it was discovered that Paul de Man had written pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic articles during the war, and while a similar controversy raged over Heidegger's Nazism, Tzvetan Todorov observed that the Heideggerians of the Nazi period were not the only ones captivated by extremist ideas:

> Both before and after the war, probably more intellectuals committed themselves, body and soul, to political Marxism in one form or another (Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Castroism). If we add to this list a number of isolated cases—such as Michel Foucault's support, however ephemeral, for the Khomeini regime—and then calculate the sum total . . . we must acknowledge that it represents, not all intellectuals, of course, but a large proportion of them.

In the Western democracies, Todorov continues,

> if . . . the franchise had been restricted to intellectuals, we would now be living under totalitarian regimes, and there would no longer be a franchise.

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In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov entertains a variety of theories justifying the murder he commits, but the crucial one is his division of humanity into a few superior people, who are thinkers and theorists, and a mass of others, who are mere breeders, to be sacrificed for what the first type consider their good. Dostoevsky's point is that the intelligentsia will surrender any belief before that one. Today, those outside academia often wonder how current orthodoxy can, on the one hand, maintain that everything including science is a mere social construct, and, on the other, be sure enough of their opinions to enforce restrictions on others. The answer is Raskolnikovism: the contradictory positions both presume the professoriate's superiority. Absolutism allows one to judge others; total relativism, which is only applied to others, allows one to ignore their evidence and focus on their motives and interests.

If one reads the principal European thinkers of the nineteenth century, one is struck that only one imagined totalitarianism: Dostoevsky. In *The Possessed*, the novel's revolutionaries anticipate that total rule will cost "a *hundred million heads.*" It's almost as if they had read *The Black Book of Communism* a century in advance. Their leader, Pyotr Stepanovich, plans to introduce an unprecedented "system of spying": "Every member of the society spies on every other one and is obliged to inform." Reading this novel in the Stalin era, Russians asked: How did Dostoevsky know? In the world of the future, Pyotr Stepanovich proclaims, there will be "total loss of individuality" and absolute equality; as a result, "Cicero's tongue will be cut out, Copernicus's eyes will be gouged out, Shakespeare will be stoned." How many American intellectuals remember that during the Chinese cultural revolution, when countless artworks of the past were systematically destroyed, the pianist who was a winner of the Chopin Competition had his hands broken? One revolutionary in *The Possessed* even suggests that education will become superfluous and dangerous: and we recall that when the Khmer Rouge wiped out a quarter of the Cambodian population, they made sure to kill anyone suspected of literacy. *How did Dostoevsky know?*

Dostoevsky guessed what would happen because he took seriously a social stratum that seems to have originated in the Russia of his times: the intelligentsia. We get the word *intelligentsia* from Russian, but it meant something very different in its Russian context. It emphatically did not mean educated people who thought for themselves. On the contrary, it designated people who adhered rigorously to an ideology; who were committed to a total revolution; who distrusted a skeptical cast of mind; who regarded both science and art as useful only to the extent they advanced revolutionary goals; and who identified themselves above all as intelligents (members of the intelligentsia). To cease to be an intelligent—let us say, by considering rather than denouncing the position of others—was about as unthinkable as for a Jew today to become a Nazi. That is why the great writers—Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky—were not regarded as intelligents. The men who eventually made the Revolution were classic intelligents. Educated people may be located on a spectrum from intelligents to intellectuals. In English we have only the word "intellectual" where we desperately need two words, one indicating a person who thinks for himself about ideas and the other a person who identifies above all with the intelligentsia. A true intellectual—like that highly independent socialist George Orwell—is not in hock to any group. As the Latin proverb says, "Plato is a friend, but the truth is a greater friend." Like Dostoevsky and Anne Frank, let us have the courage to search for it.

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Alexander Hamilton: precocious & preeminent

by Lewis E. Lehrman

Richard Brookhiser, the author of *Rediscovering George Washington* (1996), has intruded again upon the specious present, holding up for praise the character and achievements of Alexander Hamilton.[1] "He is a great man," Brookhiser writes, "a great American," not simply because he was a political prodigy who became, at thirty-two, America's first Secretary of the Treasury, or because of his preeminence among the other cabinet officers, the *de facto* first minister of the founding administration. The key to Hamilton's greatness, according to Brookhiser, was magnanimity. As the architect of comprehensive programs of economic growth and national institution building, Hamilton designed "ways to bring light to the talents of other men as well as himself." His pathbreaking policies, though not populist, "would enable his countrymen to become conscious of their resources" and thereby enrich not only their own lives but also the lives of their communities and the nation as a whole.

Unlike many who claim a Horatio Alger-like rise from obscurity, Hamilton really was the proverbial self-made man. Born in 1757 (or perhaps 1755), the illegitimate son of a feckless Scot and another man's wife, he spent his early years in the slave and sugar culture of the West Indies. His father abandoned his errant mother when Hamilton was nine, and young Alexander was then apprenticed to an export-import merchant at Christiansted; two years later, his mother's death left him on his own. He immigrated to the colonies when he was fifteen and was educated at King's College (now Columbia University). Within two decades this enterprising young man rose from utter obscurity to become one of the most celebrated American statesman in the history of the republic. Having learned early on to love Plutarch, Hamilton, it seems, was ever guided by Demosthenes: "Wise politicians march at the head of affairs," rarely awaiting "the event, to know what measures to take; but the measures which they have taken, ought to produce the event."

Hamilton's nationalist measures regarding economic and foreign policy—implemented over opposition by the states' right party of Jefferson—helped to fuel the economic boom enjoyed by the administrations of Presidents Washington and Adams. Hamilton had carefully designed his legislative program to give energy and credibility to the new Constitution and prosperity to its economic institutions. He, more than anyone, had breathed life into the constitutional experiment with his contributions to *The Federalist Papers*. Thomas Jefferson himself, ever the jealous author, called them "the best commentary on the principles of government which was ever written." But unlike Jefferson, who preened himself on

1 *Alexander Hamilton, American*, by Richard Brookhiser; Free Press, 256 pages, $25.

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his authorship of the Declaration of Independence, Hamilton wrote his portion of *The Federalist* (two-thirds of the total) anonymously. No one who has read carefully in the history of state and congressional legislative irresponsibility, and studied the catastrophic inflation of the era of the Articles of Confederation, can fail to be impressed by the economic prosperity set off by the Hamiltonian economic plan for the new republic.

But this was only the middle chapter of Hamilton's life. By the time of his death in 1804—the result of a duel with Aaron Burr—Hamilton was acknowledged by the judiciary and the Bar of New York as its first lawyer and the most effective advocate of a free press in New York. To him and his colleagues at the bar and the bench had also fallen the task of developing the new commercial law, absolutely indispensable to the effective functioning of growth-oriented free markets. Hamilton's commercial vision of diversified American economic opportunity was of a piece with his first principles of political economy. As Brookhiser reminds us, he was not only a political economist in the tradition of David Hume and Adam Smith, he was also a commercial entrepreneur, helping to found the Bank of New York (a success), an immense manufacturing enterprise on the banks of the Passaic River (a failure), and, of course, the *New York Post* (another success) of which he was the premier journalist.

Even in the austere testimony of the great judges of that era, Hamilton was regarded as an inspired lawgiver, the supreme advocate of the new Constitution. Chancellor Kent, the American Blackstone, thought him without peer: "He rose at once to the loftiest heights of professional eminence, by his profound penetration, . . . the firmness, frankness, and integrity of his character." Ambrose Spencer, a distinguished judge in New York, was often in conflict with Hamilton, but he nonetheless regarded him as "the greatest man this country has produced. I saw him at the bar and at home. He argued cases before me. In creative power Hamilton was infinitely [Senator Daniel] Webster's superior. It was he, more than any other man, who thought out the Constitution of the United States and the details of the government of the Union." These representative judgments about Hamilton's character and achievements by his peers in New York suggest the exalted place that Hamilton occupied in the minds of many contemporaries. As Brookhiser reminds us in his compelling narrative, Hamilton, an immigrant to Manhattan, became quintessentially a New Yorker: bright, inquisitive, enterprising. He is the New Yorker whose contribution to the founding of the republic put New York at parity with what Brookhiser called "the glory that was Boston and the grandeur that was Virginia."

Having grown up in the Caribbean slave culture where black slaves outnumbered white masters by a margin of ten to one, Hamilton must have developed an early intuition of the advanced views he exhibited as a young man. In 1777, while serving on General Washington's staff, Colonel Hamilton and his friend Henry Laurens sponsored a plan to raise black battalions in South Carolina and "to give them their freedom with their muskets." Hamilton argued that the then prevailing prejudice against blacks "makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor experience." Instead, Hamilton based his argument about blacks upon the equality principle: "their natural faculties are probably as good as ours," merely suppressed from "want of cultivation." This view he set out unselfconsciously and forthrightly in a letter to John Jay, the President of the Continental Congress. Hamilton was but twenty-two, into his third year as the central figure of the Commander-in-Chief's general staff. Hamilton could not be moved from his anti-slavery position; he went on to advocate it in anti-slavery circles in New York after the revolution.

There is so much more to this precocious immigrant—the luminous intellect he developed in but four years of formal education,

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the bravery he exhibited in the Battle of Monmouth, the battlefield leadership he showed with his brigade. Sword drawn, he was the first over the parapet and into the redoubt at the ultimate victory of Yorktown.

Now, if Brookhiser's thesis that Hamilton was a great man is borne out in the fascinating pages of his analytical narrative, whereto, we must ask, has the great man disappeared? Into whose vortex has history swallowed him up, and by what mechanism? It is too plain to point to the Adams family and the venerable tradition of their gifted historians and friends. Therein we find variations on a theme played out by the dyspeptic and volatile President John Adams, whose jealousy of Hamilton allowed his Christian conscience to let loose with the immortal epithet by which he characterized the West Indian immigrant: the "bastard brat of a Scotch pedlar." It would also be too straightforward to point to the astonishing power of the Jeffersonian hagiographers whose inspiration has been drawn from the prodigious scholarly work of C. M. Wiltse, Merrill Jensen, and Dumas Malone, among others. These were indefatigable scholars who took their cue from their idol himself, Mr. Jefferson, who declared Hamilton a "true colossus," but whose career Jefferson said, "from the moment . . . history can stoop to notice him," issued in "a tissue of machinations against the liberty of his country."

Hamilton most assuredly had his flaws, and, like his talents, they were outsized. But still, if Brookhiser is right in describing him as a great man, why have historians concentrated on his errors and flaws rather than his remarkable achievements? In fact, Brookhiser's account of Hamilton's legacy is nothing less than the authentication of a great deed of statecraft—of nation-building. Moreover, no reasonable scholar can dispute the fact that most of Hamilton's plan as Secretary of the Treasury had been well-crafted. Paradoxically, while he rebuilt the wellsprings of the wealth of his adopted nation, he manifestly cared nothing for riches himself. Born poor, he died poor. His ambitions were for fame, sought in the leadership of his country, designed in policies aimed at creating a unified nation—rich, powerful, well-respected.

Even his antagonists conceded, and Jefferson lamented, that Hamilton had founded the lasting financial institutions of his country, thereby giving life to the fragile fabric of the Constitution and the Federal Union, mobilizing the requisite energy in the executive to raise the federal government from the lethargy of the Articles of Confederation. He originated the tax system, the banking system, even the detailed procedures of the tariff and customs measures, which financed the new federal government. Over Jefferson's and Madison's resistance he oversaw the consolidation and refinancing of the enormous and debilitating public debt, which led, at the creation of the republic, to a vibrant organism of a solvent government—all but nullifying for a time, under the aegis of President Washington, the centrifugal forces of state autonomy. Hamilton also formulated the arguments for the liberal construction of the implied powers of the Constitution which were relied upon by our greatest Chief Justice, John Marshall, who held Alexander Hamilton to be, after Washington, the first man of his age. Next to Hamilton, Marshall felt himself to be but a candle "beside the sun at noonday."

It was not surprising that President Washington asked Hamilton to be his first Chief Justice, a position he declined. In the words of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the leading scholar-politician of a later era, Hamilton "was the embodiment of nationality." This was a decisive idea at the crucial moment when "the principle of nationality meant nothing." And "there is no single man to whom" the idea and the building of American nationality "owes more than to Hamilton." It is hard to grasp the revolutionary importance of the idea of American nationality. It is a notion so commonplace today. But one cannot emphasize enough that, until the arrival of President Wash-

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ington, Secretary Hamilton, and their Federalist protagonists, almost all power was concentrated in the individual states. Most loyalties of the ruling squirearchies of the former colonies were pledged to their state-based privileges, power, and slaves—all safely protected by the state legislatures they tended to dominate. There is insufficient space to spell out the scholarship on this point except to notice Hamilton's chief adversary, Thomas Jefferson in Congress at Philadelphia, writing wistfully of his longing to return to his "country"—namely, Virginia.

To a certain extent, then, we may wonder that there exists no memorial to Hamilton on the tidal plain of the Potomac next to the neoclassical memorial dedicated by Franklin Roosevelt to Jefferson in 1943. There is some irony in Roosevelt's presiding over this memorial to Jefferson. At that very moment FDR was carrying out by Hamiltonian means a new economic policy (though one that Hamilton might not have approved), sustained by Constitutional arguments that Hamilton and Marshall had advanced. Even more interesting, we can observe FDR forging the vital Anglo-American alliance to win World War II, manifestly a "Hamiltonian Alliance" manqué by the concrete test of Hamilton's own far-seeing foreign policy. The first Secretary of the Treasury believed that an Anglo-American entente was indispensable to our vital commercial interests, just as he foresaw that the British navy would help insulate America from the threat of entanglements and dismemberment by the competing great powers of Europe.

Hamilton's great importance to the founding of the United States makes his disappearance from the American pantheon puzzling. According to Joseph Ellis, the distinguished Adams and Jefferson scholar whose book *American Sphinx* won the National Book Award in 1997,

> Hamilton was the kind of man who might have been put on earth by God to refute all the Jeffersonian values. Dashing and direct in his demeanor, Hamilton possessed all the confidence of a military leader accustomed to command. While perhaps rooted in Hamilton's military exploits during the Revolutionary War (another heroic experience Jefferson could not claim), this palpable projection of authority called attention to its own brilliance. To make matters worse, Hamilton as an opponent was equally formidable on his feet and in print [Jefferson was feeble in debate]. Jefferson recalled his clashes with Hamilton in cabinet meetings as a form of martyrdom and warned Madison to draft all attacks against Hamilton personally, claiming that Hamilton was a host within himself.

The victory of Jeffersonian historiography (not to say hagiography) in the first half of the twentieth century had a depressing effect on Hamilton's reputation. And the enmity of the Adams clan and their advocates compounded the effect. Yet the historical debate goes on. In their landmark treatise *The Age of Federalism* (1993), Professors Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick have much to say about Adams's hatred and jealousy of Hamilton, about the animus each held for the other, "most of it less than attractive." It is clear that the Adams family tradition of inextinguishable hatred for Hamilton stemmed in part from Hamilton's trenchant criticism of President Adams at a crucial moment before the election of 1800. Hamilton had argued in a private letter (later disclosed by Aaron Burr, and now quoted from Elkins and McKitrick) that Adams

> "does not possess the talents adapted to the administration of government . . . that there are great and intrinsic defects in his character which unfit him for the office of Chief Magistrate," that in the early stages of the Revolution . . . Hamilton had begun with "a high veneration for Mr. Adams," but with time he had come to "an opinion . . . that he is a man of an imagination . . . eccentric; [not] propitious . . . to the regular display of sound judgment . . . ; that to this defect are added the . . . foibles of a vanity without bounds,

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and a jealousy capable of discoloring every object."

In this minor excerpt from Hamilton's extensive commentary upon the insufficiencies of Adams's character, we can grasp the gravamen that engendered the hostility of the Adams family and its camp of historians. But Elkins and McKitrick, after exhaustively surveying the original sources and the entire historiography of the founding period, are, on this issue, not without judgment themselves. "Hamilton's case," they opine "had it stopped there, might well have represented the judgment which history itself ought to have settled upon with regard to John Adams." But Hamilton did not let his critique end there. Indeed it went on to excess.

With Brookhiser, we must embrace not only the genius and the virtues of the first Secretary of the Treasury, but also an explication of the character flaws of the "little lion" himself. Hamilton was 5'7", handsome, and winning. He was not only self-confident, but also proud to a fault. He had not only a sense of honor, but also carried his dignity to vanity. He had the gift of tongues joined to an equal gift of the pen, and deployed them with the art of an artillery captain and the intrepidity of a regimental colonel. Prudence seldom constrained his fire.

In the absence of that disciplined restraint that Washington possessed in such abundance, Hamilton's passions—carnal and careerist—often overcame his powerful intellect. As Brookhiser notes, in Washington "for the first time in his life—also for the last—Alexander Hamilton met a man who was greater than himself. Hamilton's understanding was quicker than Washington's, and his analytical powers were greater. But in every other mental or moral quality [especially judgment and prudence], Washington was his equal or superior."

It is true; the force of Washington's example was all-pervasive. "I give in to no kind of amusement myself," General Washington wrote of headquarters, "and consequently those about me can have none." To a certain extent, Brookhiser makes clear, Washington was the gyroscope which, in war and in government, kept Hamilton's genius rotating evenly in orbit. During his short lifetime of extraordinary accomplishment, Hamilton's intense passions, it may be said, were generally well-controlled. But there were several crucial occasions when they burst through the dam, leading to decisive indiscretions: for example, his notorious affair with Mrs. Maria Reynolds (for which he was blackmailed by her husband) and his letter against Adams. Such imprudent behavior joined to his genius often ignited the contempt, envy, and hatred of the Jefferson and Adams phalanxes. Hamilton's were indiscretions that conspired to diminish, even to minimize his popular reputation and to suppress, for long periods, national esteem for his achievements. But this is still insufficient explanation for the near disappearance of Hamilton during most of the twentieth century. There is something more to this story.

It has never been widely recognized that in Abraham Lincoln and in the nationalism of the Union party Alexander Hamilton found, as it were by an invisible hand, his supreme nationalist successor. By force of will and circumstance, Lincoln found himself able to overthrow the slaveholders of the South, which had been led by the Virginia dynasty. The Jeffersonian settlement of 1800, which gave dominance within the national government to the states' rights party of the South, had finally been undone by free elections and by trial of arms. But in a paradox of American historiography, foretold by late nineteenth-century American history itself, the victory of the party of union and emancipation was in fact overturned in the early twentieth century by the academic schools of anti-Reconstruction revisionism and slavery apology led by Professor Ulrich B. Phillips. This school of historians dominated American historiography until the 1950s. Similarly, and not by accident, the slaveholding fantasies of *Gone*

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With the Wind and *The Lost Cause* prevailed in the popular mind. Both the academic and popularized tradition, which demonized Reconstruction and Emancipation and questioned the purpose of the Civil War and the justice of the Union victory, was joined to the post-World War I school of liberal historians, exemplified by the work of Vernon Parrington, among many other able scholars.

The rising liberal historians and their distinguished Jeffersonian counterparts retook the high ground of American politics—recapturing it directly from the bloody field of Union victory and Emancipation. Not until the 1950s were the apologies of Ulrich Phillips and *Gone With the Wind* brought before the bar of reason, equity, and evidence in the scholarship of Professor Kenneth Stampp's stunning book *The Peculiar Institution*. And, even more decisively, it was the civil rights struggle itself which finally gave lasting force to the Union victory and permanent meaning to the equal laws of its legacy, the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Amendments, which abolished slavery, granted equal protection under the law, and guaranteed the right to vote regardless of race.

It is no exaggeration to see in the triumph of desegregation in the second half of the twentieth century the ghost of Hamilton's anti-slavery impulse prevailing over Jefferson's attachment to the service of his slaves, and the spirit of Hamilton's nationalist program prevailing over the states' rights oligarchies of the South. Even Hamilton's drive for national economic growth, to open up wide opportunities for men and women of diverse talents, prevailed over Jefferson's abstract idealization of the tough and grinding agrarian way of life which, while honorable and primordial, was an insufficient prospect for a great and diverse nation competing in world markets.

This triumph of the Hamiltonian vision, it must be said, was foreshadowed during the nineteenth century in the opinions of Chief Justice Marshall and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, both of whom held up Hamilton next to Washington as the organizing genius of the new constitutional republic. Even for a time after World War II, in the work of Jacob Cooke, Harold Syrett, Clinton Rossiter, and Forrest McDonald, Hamiltonian ideas waxed into the firmament, eclipsing momentarily even the star from Monticello. In the end, these waxings and wanings of the life and work of Alexander Hamilton may be seen as the nocturnal linkages to the outgoing and incoming tides of ideological passion in American politics.

But, in studying such a world-decisive epoch as the American founding, the historian must not only exert every judicious discipline to avoid "presentism"; he must also peer into the past with the eye of eternity to discern in that era the permanent. In order to judge the American founding and "its feverish mentality," the contemporary eye of eternity was given but to a single man, even if one may doubt that any person could ever see his colleagues clearly. In Professor Joseph Ellis's distinctive formulation, "Only Washington seems to have remained immune [to the feverish mentality of the founding], but then he was immune to everything." For it is true that Washington's perennial effort at objectivity was as unimpeachable as the balance of his taciturn judgment. And so, for the definitive ruling in the case of Alexander Hamilton, even Mr. Brookhiser, a master of the period, will yield gladly to the judgment of President Washington. "By some," the founding father declared, Mr. Hamilton "is considered as an ambitious man, and therefore a dangerous one. That he is ambitious I shall readily grant, but it is of the laudable kind, which prompts a man to excel in whatever he takes in hand."

For the millennium, one can almost hear an inspired Richard Brookhiser rephrase the unforgettable epigram of Jefferson's first Inaugural: We were all democrats. Now we shall all become Federalists.

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Three poems
by David Yezzi

On a cliff above Seal Rocks

Behind us the city, the ocean below us.
Cold wind combed the headlands; your fingers were cold.

How long the light lasted there, light that at nightfall
moved over the transom of a slowly moving yawl.

We kept its sails in sight, our sight closing in
until, just then, the sun was under. Or then?

Or had I missed the instant, the instant *exactly*,
when evening crossed into night, when the sea

darkened, becoming as dark as the land had?
It had been like the first trace of joy when we had it,

which now seems so perfect but, then, seemed like now—
low and quotidian, difficult; difficult, low.

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Invention with seascape

Let's say our days were not immutable
but free for us to order as we choose.
Arrayed at noon, our possibilities

would hang like summer linens airing dry,
blown front- or sidewise in the saltish air,
simultaneous, available.

The prospect of our seaside lands would sprawl,
as: item, one fen; item, one ravine;
one snatch of orchard bruised with ripening fruit.

Still, at the horizon, what sudden wind
gathers now to dash this fantasy
in swells from distant waters drawing close:

a rack of breakers blanketed in smoke,
rolling, consequential, a travesty
of our push to stipulate or fend them off?

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What to do with a mountain lake

We pushed off from the crumbled dam
into a lake of clouds,
with duckweed on our scudding chins,
gliding without sound.

The jinking trees grew quietest
where water sketched in the shore,
their disheveled branches wreathed
around the mirrored air.

How sober and unrippled the lake
lay in our level view,
a paradox, it seemed to me,
that its silence held us, too.

Three concentric circles, then,
existed there at once;
widest was the wilderness,
the smallest one our own.

But what was that unruined stillness
of the lucid middle ring,
which from inside the world of flaws
bridged us with every thing?

Water colder than the wind,
so green and darkly clear
that looking downward into it
we saw just where we were:

one swimmer floating near the other
above a mottled sky
reflected in that seamless span
supporting you and me.

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Letter from Prague

Nostalgia for bad times

by Eric Ormsby

In Prague as it approaches its second millenium, nothing appears to change faster than the past. The present, of course, has been in a state of agitated flux for a decade. Hardly a week goes by that does not produce a change, often to the baffled indignation of Czechs. These changes range from the very look of long-familiar streets to the language itself, increasingly a prey to slangy neologisms. The restitution of confiscated real estate as well as the incursions of foreign investors have made checkerboards of neighborhoods that were neglected for over half a century. In the neighborhood where we have been living, the nineteenth-century middle-class district called Smíchov, street after street displays the motley mosaic of freshly repainted facades alongside the sooty and crumbling housefronts of those still too indigent to renovate; the effect is incongruous, like seeing debutantes in bright ball gowns amid throngs of dishevelled crones. As for the language, Czechs grumble but manage to subvert the intrusions of political correctness even as these worm their way into daily converse. In the 1990s, with tedious inevitability, the term "sexual harassment" entered the language and was rendered as *sexuální obtěžování*. Czechs, however, unofficially prefer the term *sexuální harašení*, coined by the novelist Josef Škvorecký, because while the word *harašení* sounds a little like *harassment* it also connotes a kind of "rustling" or "scuttling," as of a mouse in the attic. Such a locution permits Czechs to be perfectly "correct" while at the same time laughing at their own correctness.

Amid the unwelcome changes, Czech Communists are again becoming an influential factor in current political life in the republic, though Václav Havel still refuses to deal with them. Indeed, the head of the Communist party, Miroslav Grebeníček (as quoted in the newspaper *Lidové Noviny* of February 2, 1999) predicts that within ten years, Communists, not currently represented in the Czech parliament, will form an integral, and indispensable, part of the government. This does not seem unthinkable, especially if the present discontent worsens.

Few Czechs wish to return to the pre-1989 epoch, but they are not happy about all the changes. It is not mutability itself—what Wordsworth called "the unimaginable touch of time"—that troubles Praguers in this; Prague is, in its ancient stones, a continuing monument to mutability in its varied forms, imperial as well as republican. Rather, it is the frightening sense that the country is somehow out of control. When present and future become unpredictable and indeed, inscrutable, one turns with a certain yearning to the past. In the Czech past, however, as it continues to emerge, there is even less reassurance.

In winter, when I ride the streetcars to my class in "intensive" Czech, the first lights are coming on and the city possesses an in-

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timate glow. The past seems close to the touch. The high windows of sooty office buildings take on a burnished look. The glass dome of the old Ministry of Industry on the right embankment of the Vltava shines against the darkening sky. There is a blue crackle of sparks as the streetcar rounds an intersection. A whiff of coal smoke tinges the air. The city is beginning to gleam across its eleven bridges and the lights, now softened by fog, appear to nestle inside the dense shadow that clasps them. On such evenings one quickly becomes "a drinker of lights," as the Czech poet Nezval described himself. Prague has a special lambency on winter evenings. The streetcar clangs and rocks from side to side and, as it rolls, I try to wrap my tongue around such Czech phrases as *čtyřlůžkový včetně*, in which tenuous vowels glimmer out of dense consonants like the Prague streetlamps themselves.

It is all too easy to fall for the spell of this magical city. Even now, with KFC and McDonald's and Benetton and Toshiba wherever you cast your eye, there are crooked streets that twist erratically and interlace in a populous gloom and from which, you imagine, anyone or anything might emerge, from the emaciated shade of Kafka to the dread Golem itself. Luckily, such illusions prove brittle. In the next shopwindow they are displaying a new rug shampoo called *Golem* and poor Kafka has become more of a corporate logo than a shade. (Especially jarring amid the tourist paraphernalia is the new tee-shirt for sale near Wenceslas Square. Kafka is portrayed with a zombie face in which his eyes are two woozy vortices: he resembles Wile E. Coyote on a mind-altering substance; the legend beneath reads *Kafkadelic!*)

There is a curious interplay in contemporary Prague among available pasts. The stereotypical "Magic Prague" of tourist leaflets is inexhaustibly present, but has become more of a backdrop or stage set. What strikes the non-Czech visitor who peeps behind this facade is not only the bewildering intricacy of the past but also the conflicting versions of it on offer. Still more striking, in this context, is the note of nostalgia for the previous regime which surprises one occasionally, voiced though it is in a suitably ironic tone. This nostalgia for bad times, what I like to call "malanachronism," often seems little more than a rather fey and sophisticated pose. Perhaps, indeed, it should be interpreted as an expression of confidence. One does not, after all, affect regret for an intolerable time unless one is sure that it is well past. But the malanachronistic attitude, like the sublime Czech beer, has a bitter piquancy, that celebrated dash of horseradish, in its nonchalance.

This past December a much-hated landlord was murdered in Prague by a professional hitman as he treated his aged mother to Christmas dinner in, of all places, the McDonald's on Vodičkova Street not far from Wenceslas Square. Contract murders are not yet common in the Czech Republic. The fact that this one occurred at McDonald's, and that the victim was about to treat his *Maminka* to a Yuletide Big Mac with all the trimmings when he was whacked (reason enough in itself, one might think, for a rub-out), both alarmed and amused Czechs. The murder was yet another instance of the deplorable "Americanization" of Prague that is so conspicuous (never mind that the hitman was identified as Russian!). A disturbing logic seemed to be at work. First McDonald's arrives (and proliferates: there are now four around Wenceslas Square, with plans for a fifth nearby) and then, like the night the day, urban violence. A standard comment on this murder was that "under the previous regime, this could never have happened."

The motif "under the previous regime . . ." occurs in more quotidian but, just for that reason, perhaps more significant, circumstances. Cafés (and pubs) are to Prague what the agora was to fifth-century Athens. Some, such as the beautifully restored Café Slavia opposite the National Theater, are cultural landmarks. At Café Slavia, during the thawing Sixties, the poet and graphic artist Jiří Kolář assembled a dazzling group

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of artists and scholars which met daily and kept Czech art and literature alive during a very bad time indeed. At such a café, one reads or writes or meets friends or one whiles away the hours with a single much-nursed cup of coffee; there is a tacit sense that these places are public institutions, with a real if unspoken obligation to their clientele. It has thus been shocking of late to find many cafés and pubs—not only the Slavia, but also the renowned Café Louvre, where Kafka and Max Brod liked to meet, or the "Golden Tiger" pub where the novelist Bohumil Hrabal once held forth uproariously—hired for private occasions and closed to the public. This provokes intense indignation; and it is no use for a non-Czech to point out that such closures are an unavoidable consequence of private ownership.

Amid the outrage, though, there exists as well what I can only call a sort of camp malanachronism. One symptom of this was the appearance in May 1998 of a CD that became an unexpected bestseller. This was a reissue of old Czech Communist songs and marches from the 1950s under the title "The Best of KSČ" (KSČ is the abbreviation for the Czech Communist Party, and on the CD's cover the "B" was rendered in a mock-Cyrillic font to suggest Russian). This recording, which must be heard to be believed, contains such memorable ditties as "Forward with the Left Foot," "Song of the Combine Operators" (my own personal favorite), and "March of the Leninist Challenge," among others. The music is not merely appalling but genuinely eerie in its regimented beer-hall optimism. Now, ten years after the demolition of the Berlin Wall, these brassy parade ground anthems sound distant and quaintly exotic, like music recovered from antiquity.

A steep and persistent economic slump (unemployment, once unheard of, is now around 7 percent) has occasioned other more disturbing attitudes; a sullen disillusionment has set in. The revolution is scarcely a decade old but the fabled velvet is looking distinctly threadbare. No matter how intolerable, the past had a kind of clarity, at least in retrospect, that is now lacking. The idealism of the struggle against the oppression of the Communist regime has given way to the struggle to make a buck, and this revivifies the ever latent Czech sense of irony, mordant at the best of times. Tales of corruption, of graft and kickbacks, are commonplace. The bitterness of many Czechs, returned from long exile to find themselves strangers in their homelands and victims of official fleecing on a sometimes colossal scale, is palpable.

For an outsider, the saddest of all these disillusionments is the low esteem into which Václav Havel has himself fallen, especially in Prague. A recent imbroglio revealed how treacherous the Czech past can be, even for someone as well-placed as Havel. Last fall, when the former mayor of Vienna, Helmut Zilk, was nominated for an official medal, President Havel abruptly cancelled the award after the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, among others, reported that Zilk had once been a double agent who fed information to the Czech secret police. At the rescinding of the award, critics of Havel were outraged and demanded proof of the charges against Zilk. None was forthcoming, not, as it turned out, because it was necessarily non-existent, but because it was inaccessible. The president, as it happens, is forbidden access to state archives by law and so could not seek documentary evidence. Havel had acted on the conflicting advice of various advisors. This was a misstep which in earlier days Havel would never have committed. To Czechs it was evidence of his slipping grasp of daily events, perhaps as much the result of his failing health as of bad advice.

As it turns out, the state archives are not unimpeachable. The secret police sometimes apparently inserted false information into official documents. Whether the archives exonerated Zilk or incriminated him, the evidence could not be trusted. Twenty or thirty years ago the records were manipulated and rewritten by zealous and mis-

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chievous bureaucrats—or rather, some were revised and some were not; data were interpolated as well as excised, to what extent nobody can say—and those records now form the corrupted, untrustworthy Czech official past.

By common consent, Havel did himself no favor in accepting a further term as president. It is a measure of the deterioration of the ideals of 1989 that this unusual statesman—unusual in his personal nobility as well as in his intellect—should find himself so continually denigrated now in the public press. The current attacks seem designed to force his early retirement and Havel himself has mused publicly about his possible successors, naming, among three others, the (Czech-born) Madeleine "Albrightová" (as Czechs know her). When members of the Prague branch of PEN wrote a public letter recently to the newspaper *Lidové Noviny* to protest its bad treatment of Havel, another dissenting member responded by branding them all "servile and senile" and poured scorn upon their protest. (As Havel himself remarked last year, in a statement that has been widely quoted, "The nation is in a dumb mood.") At present, however, the multi-volume publication of his complete works, which Havel is supervising with intense personal interest—at this moment he must hope to be remembered more as a writer than a statesman?—was scheduled to commence in 1999 and may restore his faded prestige.

Perhaps it is yet another symptom of the nostalgia for bad times that two recent exhibitions in Prague should have dealt with the Czech past, one of these in a mythic, the other in a documentary, fashion. Malanachronism can also be a longing for a time of innocence, no matter how bad the surrounding circumstances. This was the case with the huge exposition of the works of the great Czech illustrator and painter Josef Lada (1887–1957) that was held from September 1998 to the end of January 1999 in the Riding Hall of Prague Castle. Lada is the illustrator who has most definitively shaped the Bohemian view of childhood. His books of nursery rhymes and alphabets are universally loved and every Czech knows their verses by heart. Accordingly the exhibition was mobbed by schoolchildren, day after day, along with their no less enthusiastic parents and grandparents and teachers, and the impatient, jostling lines often snaked over the cobblestones almost to the Hradčanská streetcar stop a good block away.

Even a foreigner can feel the pull of these simple but powerful images. Lada lost one eye in childhood and this fact is often mentioned to account for his unusually broad and definite brushstrokes; every figure, whether human or animal, is delineated within a black border that sets off its contours vividly from its background. (One could almost imagine Lada's figures as punched out like puzzle pieces and then fitted into their backgrounds.) This technique gives the drawings immediate, cartoon-like force. There is little, if any, room for ambiguity here. Not so oddly perhaps, this is reassuring.

And yet (it comes as a small shock), there is another side to these figures. In the children's books, the companionable cows and sly foxes, the hedgehogs and the pigs, all possess sunny and quite positive dispositions; they spout magical rhymes or hobnob and rub trotters with their human counterparts in idyllic bonhomie. Indeed, so charming are these figures that even a non-Czech begins to experience a wave of nostalgia for a village childhood he has never experienced.

In a side wing, however, the blithe Lada figures take on a different aspect. Here, in the celebrated illustrations for Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk*, is the buffoonish but cunning Švejk with his dumpling face and vulpine eyes that glitter like currants in a Czech pancake, and here are his notorious pooches, potbellied and sly, that bear more than a passing affinity to Švejk himself. With these images we begin to notice that there is more to Lada than village nostalgia. There is a bite to his benignity. Further on, as

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though at a remove, are the satiric illustrations which Lada made, mostly in 1919, in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. Of course, these drawings remained unknown during the forty years of Communist rule. They are utterly scathing. Here, to our sudden discomfiture, the benign bovines and playful apes of the alphabet books and nursery rhymes display malevolent personalities. My own favorite is Lada's depiction of a large and slovenly cow, representative of some corrupt functionary, asprawl in an armchair while a servile ape, a loyal party member, pedicures her bloated hoof with a busy rasp.

The high point of the Lada exhibition must be the eleven oils which the artist executed during the 1940s and which depict an inimitably Czech myth. These beautiful works portray the legendary troll known as Hastrman or, more generally, Vodník. A *vodník* (the first syllable denotes "water" and is cognate with *vodka*) is the quintessential Czech sprite, a figure of revery and of memory intimately connected with the landscape and the elements. Vodník was the tutelary spirit of the Lada exhibition. For months his brooding image adorned bus stops and streetcar stations throughout Prague. In Lada's paintings Vodník roosts in solemn profile on a pier or stump in the middle of a lake. He puffs on his pipe and gazes upward, usually towards a hilltop chapel and its graveyard where a full moon presides. While he smokes, fat droplets fall from his sopping green coattails: These are the souls of the drowned whom he conserves in little jars.

Lada's paintings of this curious figure are at once frightening and reassuring. Vodník has lost none of his dangerous menace. At the same time he seems to embody Czech memory, a quite specific and yet timeless commemoration. Unchanging himself, he collects and safeguards the souls of those who are lost to us; who have been, as it were, submerged. It is impossible, I think, to look at these fairy tale-like images without taking cognizance of their dates of composition: 1939, 1941, 1944. Even to a non-Czech, over half-a-century later, Vodník seems to be whispering: *Wait, be patient, I am here, I remember.*

Lada's nostalgia has a certain heroic innocence but the best corrective for the malanachronistic variety is the plain old-fashioned truth—in fact, the plainer the better. It didn't get much plainer or starker than in the Fall 1998 photographic exhibition aptly titled *Zakázané Dějiny* or "Forbidden History." This fascinating, if depressing, show made public hundreds of black and white photos from the suppressed files of the Czechoslovak news agency ČTK. The exhibition, crudely mounted as if by design, filled the entire ambulatory of the old Franciscan monastery at Jungmann Square near the heart of Old Town.

Here grainy, blurred, often indistinct images, on which the emulsions had been scratched occasionally as if in rage or frustration, revealed a history that was as horrific as it was sobering. Photograph after photograph, clumsily dry-mounted on dog-eared cardboard mats, showed just how drab and terrifying the fifty years prior to 1989 really were. The exhibition was packed from opening to closing time. It was hard to get close enough to the photographs because of the crowd; and yet you had to get close: everything was in the details, unsparingly captured by the attentive lens. Here, for example, one saw Rudolf Slánský gesticulating in the dock during his show trial. Charged falsely with treason, and later executed (and still later "rehabilitated"), he is in fact arguing for the prosecution and accusing himself more ferociously than the prosecutors themselves. The abjectness of the image is indelible. Here, from the same squalid 1950s, appears the contrastingly noble figure of the attorney Milada Horáková, also in the dock at her own phony treason trial; the lens has caught her as she turns to consider a question from behind her. The dreary light makes her prim spectacles faintly glimmer and lends her whole demeanour a forgiving grace. This brave advocate of women's rights was to be con-

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demned—and guillotined—not long after this photograph was taken.

Here too, with grim, if inadvertent, hilarity (a welcome contrast after the parades of the condemned), hung the expertly retouched images at which the regime excelled. In the exhibition, the original unretouched photos were displayed alongside the manipulated, officially sanctioned images which had been made public. It is still disconcerting to see smiling bureaucrats in one image mysteriously vaporized in the next and turned into vacant armchairs. In one, the first Communist president Klement Gotwald is bestowing a glitzy medal on a beaming sycophant; in the next, he is festooning the empty air beside him with a sweep almost pontifical. In the funniest of this series, a disconsolate President Husák is giving an address from the official balcony in what looks like Old Town Square. A few stragglers amble beneath his outstretched arms; nobody is paying attention. In the retouched version, however, a huge and lively crowd has materialized beneath the rostrum. The image-morticians were adept not only at excising figures but also at making entire throngs take shape—*presto!*—on otherwise deserted piazzas.

"Forbidden History" concluded with a single poignant image. This was a stark photograph of a clandestine bust of Thomas Masaryk glimpsed through the demolished wall of its hiding place; the Communists had made a "non-person" of Masaryk but those who revered him had treasured his portrait in secret for decades. In this final picture the legendary figure of the president of the First Czech Republic gazes from his homemade *oubliette* like Vodník himself peering from some South Bohemian pond.

As the first decade of the new Czech Republic draws to a close, the past continues to glint alluringly out of a reduced and mutable present. After class, still picking consonant fragments from between my teeth—I am working on the word *rozvrstvit*—I notice how downtown Prague alters as the dark deepens. The streetcar stop is adorned with unexpected announcements, such as that, in mangled Czech, for a "Masked Sex-Ball," featuring a "monstrous erotic program" with a group called "The Flirt Cats" who promise a "Megastrip for the First Time in the Czech Republic." The lofty facades are hidden in shadow; only the neon signs of fast-food joints remain ablaze. There are clusters of bizarrely coiffed teenagers on several corners, one sporting a vivid orange Mohawk. At such moments even a stranger can appreciate a nostalgia for bad times.

On such evenings the shifting patterns of the past seem no farther away than the Prague sidewalks themselves. One of the city's specialties is in fact its exquisite older sidewalks, artfully inlaid with mosaics of black, gray, and white granite cubes in mazy geometric patterns. As I wait for the streetcar I like to trace these with my eye. The Communists routinely buried most such sidewalks beneath layers of asphalt. Now, as properties revert to their original owners or are spruced up by foreign companies, long-hidden designs are being unearthed and chipped free; stretches of shabby asphalt alternate on block after block with freshly excavated or newly hewn designs. There is an oddly beguiling solace in this, as though the Czech past had a shape that is becoming apparent again, as close to us as the soles of our shoes. No doubt this is illusory. Whatever unexpected, subtly stratified patterns emerge, nowhere, it seems, has the past, once so settled, become more restless than here in Prague.

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Theater

What the Brits are swearing

by Mark Steyn

The New York theater community spent most of the 1980s moaning about the flood of British musicals. Now the tide has receded—the "newest" Brit mega-musical currently on Broadway has been there for eight years—and the New York theater community has reverted to its pre-Lloyd Webber pastime of moaning about the flood of British plays. This is a time-honored tradition. Thirty years ago, in his book *The Season*, William Goldman wrote, "London is my favorite city, but right now, having sat through an American theatre year, I'm sick of the English. I'm sick of rotten English actors and I'm sick of rotten English plays." Goldman blamed the British for what he called "the Snob Hit"—or rather, not so much the British but their Broadway importers: "I'm sickest of all of rotten American producers who keep bringing over damn near anything that receives the gentlest London critical approval." Goldman's verdict on the 1967–68 season could have been written last week.

Needless to say, the Snob Hit and the Brit-hit mega-spectacles play to different crowds, although there's occasionally some overlap, albeit involuntary: a few years ago, American tourists in London who couldn't get into *Cats* were pounced on by canny touts who offered them high-priced tickets for "another show by the same chap"—a gruelling revival of T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*. Curiously, in seeking to date precisely the origins of the Snob Hit, Goldman settles on January 21, 1950: the first night of *The Cocktail Party* at Henry Miller's Theatre in New York. The rules of the genre quickly became formalized. "First and absolutely crucial is this: the power of the production must be British." *Becket* was French in origin, *Marat/Sade* was German, but the versions in which they became Broadway hits were British: *Becket* in Olivier's hands, *Marat/Sade* in Peter Brook's and the RSC's. Goldman's thesis has endured through more recent productions such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and *Les Parents Terribles*, both of which came to New York in Britannicized form. The second requirement of a Snob Hit is that it has to be "at least a little unintelligible. This is because the audience that goes to the Snob Hit must be convinced that the 'average' theatergoer wouldn't understand it." And, of course, the surest way of identifying something that Joe Schmoe wouldn't get is by not getting it yourself. Derek Goldby, who directed the original production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* at the Alvin on Broadway, liked to tell the story of the couple coming up the aisle at the end of the play. "I didn't understand any of that," said the husband. His wife turned on him. "Don't say that!" she hissed.

Most of Goldman's Snob Hits only washed up in Manhattan because of the masochism of New York audiences: theater is supposed to be good for you, so, if you're having a bad time, that's a good sign; and, if

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you're looking for a bad time, a troupe of fruity London thesps cranking out a dense piece of English esoterica on an underdressed set is practically a copper-bottomed guarantee. (My masochistic theory holds for other areas of metropolitan life, too: *The New York Times* is a noted beneficiary.) Goldman himself departed Broadway for the less psychologically complex stratagems of motion pictures and in the years since has written *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *All the President's Men*, and other works on American themes. "It is very difficult to ascertain just what is American and what isn't," he wrote in 1969, "but this much can probably be agreed upon: Broadway isn't. At least, not Broadway drama." Musicals, partly by their nature and partly through fiscal prudence, tend to the universal—or at any rate the nonspecific: for all they have to say about British society, British musicals might as well be flown in from outer space (and sometimes they are: I'm thinking of *Time*, the 1987 intergalactic rock opera that starred a giant hologram of Laurence Olivier's head with the nostril in the wrong place).

But plays are perforce more rooted. A New York theatergoer finds himself in the same position as a moviegoer in London or a TV viewer in Calgary, an essentially passive observer of an alien culture where everything is familiar yet also foreign. It's not much consolation to say that every great play has a "universal theme." Hollywood likes universal themes, but demands nonetheless that they be located in Miami or Chicago. Our schoolteachers like universal themes, but insist that their charges cannot "relate" to Robert Louis Stevenson or Sir Walter Scott or Alexandre Dumas, but only to grittily "relevant" multicultural tales of the inner city. (They may have a point, judging from the recent Leonard DiCaprio remake of *The Man in the Iron Mask*—or, as I like to think of it, *Dumb And Dumas*.) Yet Broadway playgoers willingly immerse themselves in a world from which their own experiences, social customs, and linguistic rhythms have been all but banished.

As we've noted, this isn't new. Since Goldman's diagnosis, nothing has changed—in New York, that is. But Britain has certainly changed. And the British plays that provide the Snob Hits of the 1998–99 season are very different from those of the Sixties: the old-school Snob Hits had intellectual conceits, minimalist staging, Theater of the Absurd leanings. London theater in the Nineties prefers what one might call the Snot Hit—a product of the nose-picking toilet-puking heroin-shooting yob culture that nice Mr. Blair likes to promote under the genial umbrella of "Cool Britannia." The United States is not entirely comfortable with the coarser appetites of the Old Country: Hanif Kureishi's generic state-of-England piece, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, had its title bowdlerized for U.S. release, reduced to *Sammy and Rosie* . . . (get spayed?); *Shopping and Fucking* was the first play to have its title banned from *The New York Times*.

It would have amused the late Sarah Kane to find that her death at the end of February received widespread coverage in the American press, since in her short life America couldn't have been less interested in her. In 1995, aged twenty-three, she wrote a play for the Royal Court called *Blasted*, which was set in a luxury hotel room in Leeds and featured (if memory serves) homosexual rape, eye-gouging, tongue-eating, infant cannibalism, and other attractions inspired by what Miss Kane called "the incredible violence of the Bible." My old friend Jack Tinker denounced it in *The Daily Mail* as "a disgusting piece of filth," so naturally it sold out and has since gone on to great success in Australia, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy and Serbia, where frankly I'd have thought the old ethnic cleansers, genital-severers, and breast-mutilators would have found it a little tame.

Miss Kane followed *Blasted* with *Cleansed*, which had live rats on stage—a distracting innovation to me because I kept wondering what the little fellows did the rest of the time: I mean, dogs and horses

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make their bread and butter from commercials, but what does an Equity rat do in between Sarah Kane plays? You couldn't exactly call these plays brutally real—a brown rat is not, in fact, capable of picking up a human foot—but they are raw and, ever since *Trainspotting*, "raw" has been the flavor du jour. Whatever one feels about her plays, Miss Kane was the genuine article: in February, she turned twenty-eight and hanged herself. Inevitably, her rawness now seems less celebrated than exploited, and for some reason I find myself recalling a German performance-artist who a few years back cut off his penis and bled to death on stage. Any half-decent agent would have pointed out that, while the act certainly had novelty value, it lacked long-term potential: it's a rare penis-discarder who gets to celebrate fifty years in showbusiness.

So the new "raw" theater is like most other forms of theater: a balancing act. You want the foul language and the kinky sex and the brute violence, but with the gloss of mainstream pop-culture qualities: relentless hipness, digestibility, hot young talent. Presented with such a combination, New York was bound to succumb. And it has—to Patrick Marber's *Closer* at the Music Box.

Around the time of his first play, *Dealer's Choice*, Marber and I happened to be guests on the same talk show, whose host was intent on teasing out of me my opinion of the piece. Out of politeness—and solidarity with a fellow plugger—I kept mum, but I thought this poker piece an obviously derivative work by a provincial Mamet wannabee. *Closer* is, in every sense, more British. In fact, harking back to Goldman's time, I'm struck by how the new school of Brit hit is really an artful fusion of the two dominant strains of English drama from the 1960s. Back then, Broadway playgoers imagined that London was a utopia of wall-to-wall *Marat/Sades* and *Homecomings*. In fact, it was mostly non-stop trouser-droppers: *There's a Girl In My Soup*, *Let Sleeping Wives Lie*, *No Sex Please, We're British*, etc. The new Brit hit marries the bleak tone of the old Snob Hit with the preoccupations of the old sex comedy to come up with an apparently winning formula: the bleak, joyless sex comedy.

In *Closer*, four contemporary Londoners of varying degrees of unlikeability meet, couple, uncouple, re-couple. If that sounds a bit like *The Blue Room*, well, you're right—and it's amazing to find that New Yorkers have fallen for it twice in the same season. But, in fairness to Marber, he does it much better than David Hare: *The Blue Room* was Hare's adaptation of *La Ronde*, but Marber gets much closer to the spirit of Schnitzler, and to its civilized heartlessness. His casting's better, too: Nicole Kidman is starrier, but Natasha Richardson is hipper. I doubt whether any producer, for example, could have persuaded Miss Kidman—Mrs. Tom Cruise—to deliver her half of what's become *Closer*'s defining exchange: "What a cunt!" says Larry (Ciaran Hinds) of another character, and then apologizes for his language to Anna (Natasha Richardson). "I'm a grown-up," says Anna. "Cunt away." Cunt away! On the strength of this and six other deployments, articles have appeared hailing a "C-change" in Broadway audiences and arguing that *Closer* does for the c-word what *Trainspotting* did for the f-word. Such is progress. These days, the successful dramatist is advised to mind his c's and f's more carefully than his p's and q's.

The quartet of characters—journalist, photographer, dermatologist, and stripper—are as determinedly Nineties as the language, but this is an evolutionary work, not a revolutionary one: in "Cunt away," the "away" is at least as important as the "cunt"; with commendable economy, these two words, with their almost Wodehousian rhythm, get to the heart of the game. This is house-trained rawness, perfectly pitched for the theater crowd. "Porno has gone upmarket," says one character. "This is honest progress."

Closer declares its provenance right from its deceptively casual opening. A bench. Two strangers. One, a gamine northern punkette. The other, a decade or so older,

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more professional. He has a briefcase. She's foraging in it.

She: Sorry. I was looking for a cigarette.
He: I've given up.
She: Have you got to be somewhere?
He: Work. (Pause.) Didn't fancy my sandwiches?
She: I don't eat fish.
He: Why not?
She: Fish piss in the sea.
He: So do children.
She: I don't eat children, either. What's your work?
He: Journalism.
She: What sort?
He: Obituaries.
She: Do you like it, the dying business?
He: It's a living.

And on, and on.

It's very British: the relaxed acceptance of an unconventional situation would be recognizable to Wilde; the blithely urbane aphoristic dialogue isn't so far from Coward —if you can imagine Coward swearing, which he did quite a lot in private, though not on stage. That aside, though, we're not so very far from the Master, not just in the surface smartness but in the way that most of the best lines are portable: they could as plausibly be put in the mouth of some other character. The "dying business" bit is perhaps too obviously a set-up, and has a kind of false tinkle coming from the punky girl. The "fish piss in the sea" line goes down well, mainly (I think) because the audience hears it as the old barfly's joke about steering clear of water on the grounds that he'd never drink anything fish fuck in. The fact that Marber's variant doesn't quite make sense doesn't seem to bother anyone. In that sense, the pay-off is unearned. The build-up has an odd ring to it, too. I don't think he's the sort of fellow who'd take sandwiches to work, and, even if he did, it's hard to imagine a tuna sandwich or even smoked salmon prompting a line about "fish": in some fundamental way, we don't think of a tuna on rye or a smoked salmon on whatever as a "fish sandwich." It's also the case that London newspapers don't really have "obituary writers": the ninety-three-year old Indian Army General is assigned to the military historian, the forty-three-year old choreographer to the dance critic. So we have an opening in which a fake premise (the sandwiches) leads to a fake observation (the pissing fish), which leads to a fake gag (the children), which leads to a fake characterization (the obituary journalist), which leads to a fake line of dialogue (the dying business). . . .

And yet, as a whole, the scene works superbly. This is, in part, because, as director of his own script, Marber is blessed by the best ensemble on the New York stage: as Alice the stripper, Anna Friel (in her American debut) is a star-turn of northern bawdiness; as Dan the obituarist, Rupert Graves is smooth and accomplished; Hinds (Larry) is engagingly empty and brutal; Miss Richardson (Anna) imbues a character who barely rises to two-dimensional with a tender urgency. But it would be foolish to attribute the play's effectiveness solely to its cast. Like the principals of *Dealer's Choice*, Marber likes poker, and evidently he writes plays like he plays cards: technically, it's a game of chance, but everyone knows there are permutations and patterns, different ways to shuffle the same deck. As his twelve scenes advance towards their conclusion, his card-dealing, crossword-puzzle, modular-furniture method of playmaking becomes more and more exposed.

The abiding sin of English dramatists is that characters exist for dialogue, rather than vice versa. With the extraordinarily gifted, this doesn't matter. In Coward, the depth is in the glittering surface: the characters exist in their truest sense in the shallows of their speech. That's true of Marber, too. But, in some weird post-modern way, he goes further, and comes close to hinting that dialogue is inherently false, words are for suckers: the big set-piece in *Closer* is the mainstream theater's first cybersex scene, where Dan, pretending to

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be a woman, comes on to Larry and the words are projected onto a blue screen, until they explode in a massive cyberorgasm of ampersands and asterisks and pound signs and exclamations. Ultimately, *Closer* presents us with a familiar dilemma: how can you comment on the coldness and lack of emotion in society if your form is itself cold and unemotional? Whatever the answer, Marber, more than any other contemporary playwright, has the measure of the times.

Not content with their own house writers, the British are now annexing America's back catalogue, too—plays and musicals (Trevor Nunn's National Theatre revival of *Oklahoma!*, of all things, is heading to New York). *The Iceman Cometh* cometh to Broadway trailing handsome notices from London, especially for its star, the film actor Kevin Spacey. It opened at the tiny Almeida, a fringe theater in Islington; transferred to the Old Vic, with Spacey as one of its co-producers; and has now arrived at the Brooks Atkinson. Lest any Broadway folk comfort themselves with the thought that this is a great American play merely taking the precaution of using London as a economical out-of-town try-out, it should be pointed out that Spacey secured a dispensation from Equity to bring over Tim Pigott-Smith, James Hazeldine, and other British colleagues for the New York transfer. So we now have British actors doing American accents in an American play for an American audience.

In essence, the approach is not dissimilar to *Closer*—hot cast, hip production, and a rough-edged quality that suits Eugene O'Neill but which the old boy rarely receives from his compatriots. O'Neill wrote the play in 1939 in an attempt to recreate his old hang-out on Fulton Street, Jimmy the Priest's bar, where in 1912 he came close to suicide. Bob Crowley's barroom set is a wonderful sawdust-and-porter evocation of the old days, and the opening, where one by one the boozers stagger onto the stage and pass out, is splendid. They are awaiting the arrival of Hickey, a travelling man coming by for his annual binge. Spacey on screen is something of a clinical, elliptical presence, though that may be to do with the parts he chooses to take. Here, though, he's a vibrant, raucous presence. The four hours fly by, as does Spacey's twenty-five-minute speech: this is big, sprawling theater as it should be.

Finally, just a thought prompted by my experience at the end of both plays. A year or two before her death, Sarah Kane said something which deserves to be remembered as much as any of her headline-grabbing cannibal dramas. "I hate the idea of the theater just being an evening pastime," she complained. "It should be emotionally and intellectually demanding. I love football. The level of analysis that you listen to on the terraces is astonishing. If people did that in the theatre . . . but they don't."

By "football," she meant soccer. But it holds true for most North American sports. I write this after listening to the Montreal Canadiens postgame show on the radio, and it seems to me unarguable that the average sports fan is more engaged than the average theatergoer. Walking up the aisle after *Iceman* and *Closer*, you couldn't help feeling that for a substantial portion of the audience the play was evaporating with every step towards the lobby until, by the time they hit the sidewalk, the whole thing had vanished, leaving only a Cheshire cat smile of smug self-satisfaction. The old habits of the Snob Hit die hard: if dinner afterwards is the reward for sitting through the show, why spoil it by bringing up the play?

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Art

Disaster relief

by Karen Wilkin

The Great Plains are famous for bitter winters and long-lasting snowfalls. (I know this from experience, having worked at a museum on the Canadian prairies for seven years.) But the snow that blankets those flat stretches of land from November to March is part of what makes the region so fertile; prairie farmers worry if there isn't enough of it. As for the arctic cold—prairie dwellers are proud of their endurance. ("There's no nicer weather," an Alberta-born curator told me, with perfect seriousness, "than ten or fifteen degrees below zero with the sun shining.") Even by these standards, the winter of 1997 was fierce, marked by record blizzards and brutal cold, especially in Manitoba and North Dakota. And that spring, swollen by the winter's larger than normal accumulation, the region's Red River rose to unprecedented levels in a vast area from Fargo to Winnipeg and beyond.

Normally, for the tough, resilient inhabitants of North Dakota, high water, like ferocious winter weather, is simply another challenge to be met. Creeks and rivers always rise in the spring when winter snow and ice melt; if the water threatens to get too high, it can be controlled, with hard work and team effort. But this rising was no ordinary spring runoff increase. The Red River became a torrent that eventually crested at fifty-four feet—twenty-six feet above flood level—and even though volunteers worked themselves to exhaustion piling sandbags into dikes to contain the river this great surge of water rose above all their defenses. An unstoppable flood of swirling muddy water flowed through the town of Grand Forks, destroying buildings, contaminating drinking water, and forcing thousands of people to evacuate their homes. Some waded, some went in boats; all of them left their possessions behind. Not only homes but also public buildings, including churches, libraries, and the town's only synagogue were devastated by the flood. Most dramatically, in downtown Grand Forks, eleven buildings were consumed by fires, blazing uncontrollably in the midst of an impassable landscape of water with a kind of perverse beauty, at once horrifying, tragic, and unforgettable.

In civic terms, the core of the town was ravaged, the urban fabric destroyed. In human, domestic terms, the continuity of the lives of the people of Grand Forks was permanently disrupted. For many, their homes were not simply damaged by the floodwaters, but rendered forever uninhabitable; temporary arrangements made hurriedly to ensure safety had to be turned into permanent relocations. One of the few buildings in Grand Forks to escape flood damage was the North Dakota Museum of Art, which responded to the upheaval within the community by commissioning works to commemorate the disaster. I am not going to debate here the *usefulness* of works of art in the face of human tragedy, although there is obviously ample evidence

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that human tragedy can offer a potent stimulus to works of art. What I will say is that however difficult it may be to measure its impact in the face of wholesale destruction, the Grand Forks commemorative commission elicited at least one powerful, resonant, moving work: *Floodsongs*, an installation by the video artist Mary Lucier now on view at the Museum of Modern Art.[1] That's not an inconsiderable legacy.

I've been following Lucier's work with interest for more than fifteen years, ever since I first found myself riveted at an otherwise predictable Whitney Biennial by her poetic, modestly-scaled multiple-screen installation *Ohio at Giverny*. I was similarly fascinated when I encountered *Wilderness*, a slightly later work that, like *Ohio at Giverny*, was a dreamy meditation on the intersection of art, artifice, and nature evoked by repeated images set in changing relationships. What distinguished Lucier's work for me from that of other video artists then, as now, was the seamlessness and richness of its visual and narrative properties (which is not to discount her use of sound). Instead of using the camera to record staged events or to generate some sort of electronic phenomenon, Lucier played delicately with art historical and literary allusions at the same time that she commented on, among other things, the changing relationship of nature and culture, present-day ecological issues included. Lucier's images were arresting and often very beautiful, but what was most impressive was the subtlety of her approach; her work was mercifully free of bombast, irony, pretension, or reference to the 1950s (no mean achievement, in the world of what is sometimes called "new media"). Moreover, Lucier's work was utterly dependent on perceptively chosen images whose special qualities—repetitions and shifts of speed, for example—were bound up with the capabilities of her medium. Lucier's sound tracks, usually composed by the composer Earl Howard, were as elusive and suggestive as her images. I was hooked.

Lucier's subsequent work has shifted directions slightly. She has become more concerned with explicit narrative and specific individuals than with accumulations of images that derive their meaning, at least in part, simply from being associated with one another. She has changed emphasis without compromising any of the provocative visual qualities that made her earlier work so strong. If anything, Lucier's growing concern with what I suppose would be called "figuration" if she were a painter has made her work even richer, denser, and more compelling. Her absorbing, melancholy *Last Rites (Positano)*, for example—seen at the Lennon-Weinberg Gallery in 1995—was a revealing exploration of part of Lucier's own family history. A strangely affecting "collage" of video images, recorded voices, water sounds, and real objects wrenched from the ordinary world, *Last Rites (Positano)* is a complex fugue constructed out of the visual and the aural, the factual and the manipulated, out of memory and the passage of time itself. *Floodsongs*, which Lucier describes, like *Last Rites (Positano)*, as a "talking piece," moves further in this direction with very different results in terms of mood, texture, and details. Like *Last Rites (Positano)*, *Floodsongs* incorporates "portraits" of individuals, voices, and real objects (here a few pieces of furniture salvaged from the flood), and succeeds in both stirring our feelings and making us reconsider what we mean by "home," "shelter," "permanence," and more. The musical analogies persist as well; Lucier has called *Floodsongs* "a contemporary oratorio."

Perhaps the first thing to be said about *Floodsongs* is that Lucier uses images neither of the flood itself nor of that apocalyptic vision of flame and floodwater, the burning buildings in downtown Grand Forks. Instead, she concentrates on the effects of the disaster on the people of the town, focusing on the intimate recollections of seven of the flood's victims. She shows them deadpan,

1 *Floodsongs*, by Mary Lucier, opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on March 13, 1999. It remains on view until June 20.

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frontally, usually close up and larger than life. The camera captures momentary, but immensely revealing, changes of expression that tell the stories as clearly as the victims' talk about their lives before and after the flood. Softly but clearly lit, and set against dark backgrounds that somehow feel cavernous in spite of the shallowness of the depth of field, these insubstantial electronic images of the citizens of Grand Forks have the gritty presence of nineteenth-century portraits.

We "meet" Lucier's subjects slowly. When we enter the darkened room where *Floodsongs* is installed, we are confronted by an enormous, continuously screened film of flood-damaged homes. The camera moves through the ruined interiors, lingering on often surprising details: a grubby sink, a keyboard, wallpaper patterns, an LP of *The Damnation of Faust*, a lovingly handwritten list of records, like something from a jukebox, itemizing such classics as "Muskrat Ramble." The camera moves slowly, as though fascinated by the textures and muddy hues that bear witness to the vanished waters. (Sometimes you can almost smell the dampness and mold.) For a few moments, the jagged rhythms of a hand-held camera underline the visible chaos of a water-ravaged interior, but then the recording eye settles back once again into a calm, controlled inventory of damage. Occasionally there is a suggestion that efforts have been made to salvage or restore some kind of order to the devastation—futile, it seems, since the rooms appear to be both uninhabited and uninhabitable.

We move outside, where people have scrawled messages or left stuffed animals as decorations on the steps of their former homes; the camera briefly inspects a grotesque, oddly decorated stuffed creature fastened to a tree. A giant backhoe tears down an irretrievably damaged building. We follow a man to the entrance of an abandoned house, the camera revealing to us only his back and the accumulating mud on his shoes. The sequences are not illogical, but they nonetheless seem fragmented, disorienting.

We never see the cataclysm itself, only its aftermath, but the images of the flood's effect make us forcibly aware of the power of natural phenomena, reminding us of the fragility of what we regard as shelter. These testimonials to the impermanence of the man-made are punctuated at widely spaced intervals with brief, close-up images of an elderly man and woman. He is rather handsome, alert, weatherbeaten, and surprisingly cheerful. Her expression is harder to read; a paradigm of small-town middle America with her permed gray curls, she looks down and away from the intruding camera.

The cumulative effect is fairly grim. Everything seems brownish, grayed, drained of real color, comfortless. Yet there are also moments of amazing beauty. Perhaps the most memorable image in the extended large-screen sequence—actually its beginning—is a powerful metaphor for both despair and optimism. We see only a blank, slightly flickering screen. Then, on the right side, a blurred male figure, apparently obscured by thick mist, gradually becomes visible, as though he were walking into the camera's range from behind us. He moves slowly away, growing smaller and less distinct as he penetrates the fog and then, just as slowly, he passes himself and comes towards us again, never becoming clearly visible in the enveloping mist, but growing insistently larger and larger.

As we watch the large screen's thoughtfully inflected depiction of the effects of the flood, we are constantly aware of other presences in the room. Monitors mounted slightly above eye level on either side keep the images of Lucier's seven subjects constantly within our peripheral vision, demanding that we wrench our attention away from the camera's slow progress through the remnants of houses and focus on the people who once lived there. Distinct personalities emerge. Close to the big screen is an older woman with a penetrating, bitter laugh; animated and flirtatious, she's clearly enjoying the attention of being

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interviewed. Opposite her is a plump, dark-haired young man, as grave and self-contained as she is lively: a solemn, Buddha-like presence who sits, nearly immobile, with his hands clasped on his belly. Next to him is a handsome woman with elegant gray hair and beyond her is an earnest clergyman in clerical collar. On the opposite wall, the monitor alternates between a middle-aged man and woman, both subdued, demoralized. Beside them is a lovely young girl with Pre-Raphaelite hair, emphatic eyebrows, and an astonishingly mobile, expressive face. She says little and sits for long periods engrossed in her own thoughts.

Occasional bursts of sound pull us toward one monitor or another—the flirtatious woman's laugh; the true, sweet singing of the gray-haired woman; a short phrase from the young girl—but for the most part, the images themselves compel us. Lucier plays with the speed of what we see, slowing the video tape to isolate and monumentalize expressions to expose feelings. Fleeting changes, sidelong glances, or compressions of the lips that might have appeared quite insignificant in the course of a conversation become solemn ritual "performances" full of meaning. The gay laugh and the animation of the sprightly woman give way to silence and sadness as she raises her eyes with infinite slowness and then, just as slowly looks sideways; flirtatiousness turns to introspection. She lifts a beringed hand with glacial speed to her forehead and hides her face. The gesture becomes overwhelmingly eloquent, the pose endlessly prolonged. But when we look again, the image has returned to normal speed and she is once again chatting and smiling and flirting.

The sound component of *Floodsongs*, again a collaboration with Earl Howard, captures the imagination of some viewers and enrages others. Just as Lucier manipulates images for expressive effect, so too she manipulates sound. Even when we come close to the monitors, it's difficult (and often impossible) to hear clearly what her subjects are saying. Most of what they recount is subsumed by an all-encompassing wash of sound—almost like rushing water—that is in fact, a mix of all of their voices electronically altered. Just as the loops of visual tape run in different sequences—images eventually repeat, interrupted by moments of blankness, but each monitor has its own rhythm, so that visual relationships change over time—the various soundtracks overlap and intersect at intervals. Usually what a subject says is in synch with the image, but when the image slows down, the narrative continues independently or it ceases altogether.

Waves of background sound drown the individual voices like rising waters, while to add to our sense of unease and disequilibrium, the volume of the voices also varies. Often, we feel as though we were not being addressed by Lucier's subjects, but rather that we were eavesdropping on private monologues, an uncomfortable suggestion that triggers thoughts about what happens to privacy when the place where we could retreat, surrounded by things special to us, simply ceases to exist. Every once in a while, a single telling phrase emerges clearly, like an aria in an oratorio, an often inconsequential observation that gains a kind of eloquence by being wrenched out of context. "Just standing there," the Buddha-like young man, one of the heroic sandbaggers, says of people watching the water rise. "We thought we'd live there forever. We loved it there," the subdued middle-aged woman says flatly. "It's fun there but it kind of gets lonely with no friends around," the young girl says. Sometimes the room becomes eerily quiet, as all sound tracks fade away.

It's possible to experience *Floodsongs* simply by letting all of this—there is no other way of saying it—wash over you, allowing images and sounds to create a sense of disquiet that serves as a convincing, albeit slightly obvious, metaphor for the piece's subject. Spending more time with the work, like listening to a complex musical composition more than once or rereading a

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novel or looking closely at a painting, makes individual threads and lines emerge more closely, making the metaphor more subtle and adding layers of meaning. Over time, the differences between each of Lucier's subjects becomes more evident. We become engaged, for example, by the objects the handsome woman shows us—a book, yards of trimming—that are never wholly explained by the narrative. We start to pay closer attention to the demeanor of the Buddha-like young man and come to realize that in contrast to the exaggeratedly slow movements of the other "characters," his near immobility owes nothing to the manipulation of film speed. He's a somber, calming presence, both visually and in terms of his matter-of-fact recounting of the drama of the flood—"the bass," Lucier calls him—and it's clear that it's no accident that he faces the animated woman with the brittle laugh.

Floodsongs is demanding. It asks that we make an effort to hear what its subjects are saying; it requires that we invest time in order to follow its cycles and repetitions. But it rewards both the effort and the investment. Only if we stay through the full cycle of the young girl's monitor—a matter of minutes, not hours, I should immediately say—will we be treated to one of the installation's most beautiful (and necessary) images, a marvelous counterpoint to the drab, watersoaked interiors and the softly lit "portraits" of Lucier's subjects. In a sense, we are prepared for this shift by the footage of the girl herself since, unlike the other flood victims, she's young and unconventionally beautiful, and her oversized blue parka provides a rare note of color in the otherwise murky palette of the piece. But Lucier's development of these notions still comes as a surprise. We expect that the "talking head" portrait mode is continuous, but suddenly the frontal close-up of the young mobile face is replaced by an image of clear, sparkling water that fills the entire screen. A young, slender girl swims into view, moving easily and comfortably underwater, her shape elongated and fragmented by the patterns of the ripples. She crosses the screen with a few leisurely strokes. For a moment, the destructive qualities of water implied by the rest of *Floodsongs* become irrelevant. Water loses its aspect of menace and regains—briefly—its character as something essential to our well-being, as something benign, pleasure-producing, and not to be feared. Even though we have not seen any images of the floodwaters themselves, their presence clearly haunts *Floodsongs* and this momentary transformation of associations comes as an enormous relief. Like the image of the man moving in and out of the mist, this briefly glimpsed swimmer sounds a note of optimism amid the ruins. But then it vanishes and we are back in the somber world of ruined homes and disrupted lives.

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A Spring roundup

by Mario Naves

Few venues embody the free-for-all that is today's art world as fully as the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens. An old school building located in industrial Long Island City, P.S.1 is an institution dedicated to the anti-institutional. Providing ample space to the jumble of current artistic practice, the art center still hearkens back to its original function. This is part of P.S.1's appeal: one can't help but experience a nostalgic disassociation in encountering, say, an inflatable Tyrannosaurus in a gallery vaguely reminiscent of one's fifth-grade math class. P.S.1 milks the underlying impulse of public education, albeit subliminally, by advocating any and all brands of artistic endeavor. That the work on view rarely transcends the diverting (or the annoying) doesn't make the best case for democratic principles, however. A friend suggested that P.S.1 would better serve the culture at large if it were turned back into a school. My son recently spent an afternoon there and thought the place, with its sinister stairwells and finches in the gallery, a blast. Which goes to prove, I suppose, that much of what passes for art nowadays is best appreciated by a five-year-old child.

In this context, the austere sculpture of Ronald Bladen (1918–1988) looks as if it were that of an old master. The exhibition "Ronald Bladen: Selected Works"—on view at P.S.1 until May 30—alludes to the minimalist's oeuvre without giving it shape. We are left to intuit a sensibility responsible for objects as diverse as gargantuan monoliths, smudgy romantic drawings, and canvases encrusted with oil paint. An attempt at even a barebones chronology would have given the aesthetic shifts of Bladen's art import. As it is the show is haphazard, a condition due, in part, to architecture that doesn't lend itself to museological flow. Admittedly, one has to sympathize with any museum given the task of displaying sculpture whose scale can strain the parameters of even the most spacious of galleries. (One huge work, *Rockers* [1965], can be seen in the center's courtyard.) Installing Bladen's work must have been a challenge, a challenge P.S.1 hasn't always met successfully. *Curve* (1969), for instance, is shunted in a space that makes it less a sculptural experience than a traffic obstacle.

Bladen's mature work is, in its rigor, uptight and solemn. Comprised of a simplified and often symmetrical geometry, his sculpture has an inherent tension that holds firm—what the sculptor Joel Shapiro refers to as a "lean." Bladen's forms turn back on themselves, seemingly driven by magnetic force. His art doesn't have the mute authority of Donald Judd's boxes or the environmental drama of Richard Serra's arcs. But Bladen was after something more elegiac, and the resulting work is handsome and implacable.

Although he was personally involved in the construction of his pieces, this physical and, one senses, meaningful investment is

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abrogated by the anonymity of the seamless surfaces and black eggshell housepaint. In the distillation of his self-admitted romanticism, Bladen forsook shabby pleasures—for example, *Coltrane* (1970), an "unfinished" model and the most satisfying piece in the show—for the dictates of absolute form. This resulted in a minimalism conducive more to interior decoration than to aesthetic rumination. The most rewarding moment of "Ronald Bladen" comes in an expansive, light-dappled space where a dozen or so sculptural studies bump off each other in a manner that is more engrossing than any one piece taken individually. Here installation animates art by denying its autonomy. This would have chagrined the artist but it speaks to the narrow scope of Bladen's art.

Most of the sculptures in "Willard Boepple: The Sense of Things"—seen last March at the New York Studio School—were box-like containers placed, for the most part, on the wall at eye level. Inside the boxes, objects shift and conjugate. The format serves as both a literal support for things—a shelf—and a metaphorical vessel wherein events unfold. The pieces are made from pine, and Boepple burnishes his surfaces with graphite and wax, giving the work a steely, machine-like presence reminiscent of woodshop leftovers or the contents of a toolbox. His containers are scaled to the human form or, rather, to human usage. Their surfaces and construction connote the carpenter's craft and, concomitantly, the human hand. Indeed, Boepple's sculpture has an inherent—how does one put it?—graspability. In each piece, the act of packing, stacking, removing, and joining is made palpable. There is a gritty satisfaction in the heft of these pieces. In a culture as "virtual" as our own, Boepple returns to us the hard-earned satisfaction of the handmade object.

It should be reiterated that Boepple's shelves aren't neutral receptacles. The concrete limits of his boxes generate as well as sequester the objects they contain. This is as true for a piece as jam-packed as *Meaning* (1998) as it is for the demarcated spaces of *The Sense of Things 2* (1995). In both cases, the eye is gently guided, and just as gently redirected, by subtle modifications in our angle of vision. In Boepple's art there is a tug, if you will, between a systematic unity and the multifarious component. This "tug" can be acrobatic as in *Cucullan* (1998) or slow and spooky as in the magnificently corporeal *Casual Water 3* (1997). The compression of the box gives the work its knotty intensity. An "unboxed" work like *Gearless* (1998), in comparison, falls flat because its space is neither engaged nor complicated; the sense of expansion it implies lacks muscle. (Need I mention that an object without gears is one that probably won't work?) Still, this is minor carping. Willard Boepple's sculpture—arresting, mysterious, and stubbornly itself—made for one of the outstanding shows of the season.

Anne Peretz's landscape paintings—seen at the Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in March—are those of a painter for whom the natural world is awesome and inscrutable. Peretz's work has an implicit drama, often operatic in nature. In her paintings, rocky cliffs congregate like actors entering a stage, trees tower forebodingly, and rivers rush in a torrent right into the viewer's space. (One would tread cautiously in Peretz's woods.) Joseph Leo Koerner, writing in the catalogue, locates the turbulence of the paintings in the artist's discovery of "the tragedy of landscape." This melodramatic flourish rings a bit false, particularly when the artist herself flatly proclaims: "I don't like cheerful." Indeed, one wonders if Peretz's art wouldn't benefit from an ample dose of good cheer. One doesn't doubt that the artist's romantic streak is based in fact, but the paintings are dour rather than sublime. Her surfaces are scruffy and the painthandling is overly insistent, particularly when a palette knife was used. More debilitating is the absence of pictorial light; the work's overall tonality is muffled, as if her range of values had been filtered through a scrim. Peretz states that

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she "winnows" the experience of landscape into the act of painting. One wishes, however, that she spent less time winnowing and more time amongst the trees. Perhaps a portable easel would do the trick.

"The thing about Stephen is that he knows everybody in the art world." I overheard this statement while attending the latest show of paintings by Stephen Westfall—seen at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc. last February and March. As someone who doesn't know the artist, I can nevertheless attest to Westfall's ubiquity. His isn't a household name, to be sure, but Westfall has been for the past fifteen years or so a reliable presence in the art world. He's exhibited regularly and also writes about art, contributing to magazines such as *Art in America* and to numerous exhibition catalogues. The images for which Westfall is best known are flat, gridded fields, variations on the delicate alliance between figure and ground. These grids, however, aren't stable structures; they're wobbly and fidgety—scaffolds of dubiety. Tweaking the conventions of classic geometric painting, Westfall has proven to be a good-natured formalist.

Westfall's love for the clarity of, say, Mondrian's art has always been clear; it's also plain that he finds the aesthetic (and philosophical) certitude of the Dutch master a bit alien. A cultivated skepticism has marked Westfall's art. His paintings are always smart, but often tepid—proficient with little followthrough. Until now, that is. With his recent pictures, Westfall has given his casual geometry a reason for being. He has complicated—enriched, really—his paintings by superimposing one evasive grid upon another. This may seem a simplistic tack, but it is one that is surprisingly riveting. With the pulse between positive and negative space having been augmented, Westfall has created images that are, often times, hard to look at. The eye traverses his compositions looking for connections that aren't forthcoming. Westfall's linear networks skittishly dance in a way that keeps the eye moving and delighted. He's shaken the modernist grid like a snow globe and found that its authority is not altogether diminished. In the process, Westfall has given his wit weight and discovered that painting is more than just a parlor game.

Editor's note: We wish to call our readers' attention to the publication of *Beauty and the Beene: A Modern Legend* by Laura Jacobs (Harry N. Abrams, $17.95).

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Music

At last, the promised land?

by Alexander Coleman

On Saturday, February 20, most of the usual weekly listeners to the Texaco-sponsored broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera cannot have been pleased by the sounds emanating from their radios. For the first time, Arnold Schoenberg's opera *Moses und Aron* was broadcast to an audience noted for their decades of loyal and fervent support of operas like *La Traviata* or *La Bohème*. True, a surprising number of seats at the Met had been sold for a prior performance on February 11 and the ovations on that occasion had been hearty and vociferous, but one can wager that many listening to the Saturday matinee broadcast quickly voted with their fingers and moved to another location on the dial.

Sixty-seven years after its composition, *Moses und Aron* is still a barrage of sound, a sonic avalanche. The spelling of both names in the title is unusual. As the annotator Michael Steinberg has pointed out, "Moses" is "Mose" in German, "Aaron" is "Aaron," as in English. The two *a*'s in Aaron's name have been shortened to one *a*, while an additional *s*, borrowed from the English spelling of "Moses," has been added, making both spellings foreign to the German reader, unsettling and perhaps alien to those used to Martin Luther's version. In any case, the resulting twelve letters match, at least numerically, the twelve-tone row that governs the permutations of the whole opera. The fact that Schoenberg was born on September 13, 1874 and was fervently triskaidekaphobic must have produced a sense of foreboding from childhood on. As a composer, he was always seen (and above all by himself) as the heroic outsider. Many thought of him as a pariah and musical defiler of the three B's of German musical tradition, while others, admittedly a minority of music lovers, considered him a musical Moses, a giver of laws. It is difficult to evoke the fury and derision occasioned by his music in the early Vienna days, though the treatment accorded to his mentor and friend Gustav Mahler must have steeled him for the worst. For instance, at the first performance of Schoenberg's magnificent String Quartet No. 2, the review of the work was printed in the "Crime" section of the *New Vienna Daily* of December 22, 1908, the critic suggesting that the music sounded like "a convocation of cats."

Schoenberg himself never heard any part of *Moses und Aron* performed. Promises were made but never kept. The first performances were in Switzerland in 1957, six years after he died. The instrumental, choral and vocal demands are even now at the very limit of contemporary technical execution; only major opera houses can possibly do it justice. Sir Georg Solti, a master technician who delighted in the complexity of "new" music, noted, "I remember so vividly the fears and anxiety I had when I first studied the score of *Moses und Aron* in 1965. I found it unbelievably complicated, and thought I would never manage to learn it. But since

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then I have performed the work over twenty times." The difficulties that accompany the initial hearing and perception of the work derive not only from Schoenberg's by now well-known pantonal musical vocabulary, but also in the wild mélange of forces needed to realize the grand vision that the opera contains. *Moses und Aron* requires a large and highly energized orchestra, a choir that has mastered both traditional singing parts and *sprechstimme*, a kind of musical declamation. There are highly demanding parts for both Moses, who is listed as a "speaker" in the score, and Aron, a *bel canto* tenor. Other supporting singers of considerable technical agility are needed, along with a corps de ballet essential to realize the sonic and visual showpiece of the second act, the orgy/dance around the Golden Calf.

There is also the matter of Schoenberg's own libretto, drawn freely from well-known passages in the Books of Exodus and Numbers, but with notable alterations and reformulations of the biblical story. Unlike so many librettos, it is not a "weak sister" in the relation between words and music, where the words are there just enough for the characters to launch into song. As Auden put it, "libretto . . . offers as many opportunities as possible for the characters to be swept off their feet by placing them in situations which are too tragic or fantastic for 'words.'" This is an ongoing balancing act, first announced by that eighteenth century saying "prima la musica poi le parole" —though some composers preferred the reversal of these same terms.

In Schoenberg's case, both words and music are at once inextricably bound to and wildly divergent from each other. This is the quandary which is the axis of the libretto: the irreconciliability between idea and representation of that same idea, between archetype and its expression, between the "one, infinite, omnipresent one, unperceived and inconceivable God" and his verbal and pictorial earthly representation. Schoenberg has done something rare for an opera composer; he has fashioned a libretto of both religious and philosophical resonance, an opera for a thinking audience, and he makes it work on stage by means of a clever dramaturgy and carefully thought-out staging. He had to manhandle the Bible a bit. For instance, the substance of the first act is the miracles: Moses's staff turned into a snake, Moses's hand becoming leprous and being cured, the waters of the Jordan turned to blood. In the Bible, these are miracles wrought by God. In the libretto, it is the showman Aron who does the job.

But at the most elemental level of Schoenberg's intent, before any echoes or ramifications of the literary libretto are teased out, the basic quandary demands that Moses should not and must not sing under any circumstances (except for an inexplicable nine bars in Act I). He is closer to immeasurable silence than to idle words or song. He must express himself gruffly in *sprechstimme*, telling all of the mission given him by God. He does not yet know he will fail. But, Aron, his "mouth" and worldly agent, should and must sing with all the florid *bel canto* roulades he can muster. He sings almost tonal arias. His is the power of word and song over the masses. As a betrayer of the extraordinary to the commonplace, he is just the man for a rally or a grand convocation. He is, alas, a leader (ein Führer), a Jim Jones of another time. The opera was finished on March 10, 1932. In Germany, yet another kind of Führer was soon to become chancellor.

Biblical preoccupations were not at the forefront of Schoenberg's formative years. He was born into an emancipated Jewish family in Vienna: his mother came from a Prague cantorial family while his father was a simple shoemaker from Slovakia. Schoenberg was something of a radical free-thinker and an enthusiast of the excoriations of Karl Kraus, the apocalyptic journalist who had already described the Vienna of his time as the "experiment station for the end of the world." Schoenberg was "never anti-religious but never really unreligious either," and in 1912, he noted in a letter that "I have been wanting to write an oratorio on the

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following subject: modern man . . . despite having been an atheist, still having in him some residue of ancient belief (in the form of superstition) wrestles with God and finally succeeds in finding God and becoming religious. Learning to pray!" The increasing anti-Semitism in both Austria and Germany, the attacks against him as a "Jewish" composer, all culminated in his "re-entry into the community of Israel" in Paris on July 24, 1933, with Marc Chagall as the only witness.

In a notable letter to Alban Berg, Schoenberg affirmed, "Everything I have written has a certain inner likeness to myself." Indeed, after the composition of *Moses und Aron* (1930–1932) and the beginning of his permanent exile in the United States, Schoenberg almost single-handedly tried to organize the salvation of European Jewry by means of a "Jewish Unity Party," which would negotiate with the German government for the orderly exile of emigrés to a homeland still to be found. Schoenberg said he would "sacrifice [his] art to the Jewish cause." In this fantastic propoganda campaign which he himself would lead, he needed to "lease an airplane permitting me to complete as quickly as possible the travels which it would enable me to undertake, a mobile home, a special broadcasting staff, disc recordings of my important speeches, sound films." He would speak with Roosevelt. He hoped for the enrollment of four million Jews contributing one mark a month for the cause. This political program, called "A Four-Point Program for Jewry," was drafted in the first months of his exile in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1933 and given final form in California in 1938. It came to naught. By the time of the Kristallnacht of November 1938, Schoenberg/Moses, "realizing the utter futility of his political effort, turned increasing inward."

Schoenberg's depiction of Moses might also be thought of as a self-portrait of himself as the reviled musical revolutionary. He sensed his mission as the bringer of a salvational musical system that would lead harmonic usage out of the dead end of tonality vitiated by excessive chromaticism. Schoenberg's twelve-tone expansion of musical language was one that was taken up by his "disciples," Anton Webern and Alban Berg, with varying degrees of rigor, at times with a language veering toward tonality (Berg), in other instances an even greater musical economy and manipulation of silence (Webern). Ironically, this expanded language was later employed by the more popular Igor Stravinsky, but only after the master himself had died. It is not impossible that the shadow of Stravinsky among other targets lurks behind the facile changeling that is Schoenberg's Aron. Schoenberg was not wont to forgive backsliders.

Ever suspicious of executants of his work who might have wayward or idiosyncratic ideas about the staging of this opera, Schoenberg filled the orchestral score with the most specific stage instructions imaginable, with the idea that "I wanted to leave as little as possible to those new despots of the theatrical art, the producers, and even to envisage the choreography as far as I'm able to." He does this, above all, in the orgy scene around the Golden Calf, but even Cecil B. DeMille would have blanched at the specifics: "During Aron's last speech processions of laden camels, asses, horses, porters and wagons enter the stage from different directions, bringing offering as of gold, grain, skins of wine and oil . . . the animals are decorated and wreathed . . . butchers with large knives enter and with wild leaps dance around the animals." There is more. Four naked virgins, that is, "naked to the extent that the rules and necessities of the stage allow and require" are sacrificed—"the priests thrust the knives into their hearts. The blood is caught in receptacles. The priests pour it forth on the altar." Mr. Graham Vick, in charge of this Metropolitan Opera staging, gave us a Golden Calf scene that is an appropriately orgiastic crowd pleaser, sans animals and droppings, but with some blood. Faithful also to the "despotism" decried by Schoenberg, Mr. Vick and his set and costume

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designer Paul Brown gave us a band of well over one-hundred oppressed choristers/Israelites dressed as Hasidim apparently out for a toot at a Brooklyn deli or venting their rage at City Hall. The orgiasts themselves had a Brechtian cast, cavorting in mangy furs out of Goodwill, flashbulbs popping, plastic surgeons doing their thing, all very glitzy. Pity the muscle-bound men of the Met chorus, who had to prance about bare-chested for the Dance of the Butchers, smearing themselves with offal and dreck, heartily bellowing all the time. These are the producer's importations, and why not, I suppose; anything goes these days. Haven't we seen Wotan singing in a tuxedo?

What is of final import is the visually impressive ochre sets of the blasted wastes, and, of course, the transmittal of both word and music under the leadership of the demonically possessed James Levine. Philip Langridge's oily Aron was already well known through his 1985 recording with Sir Georg Solti; equally impressive and stentorian was the Moses of John Tomlinson who poured forth his *sprechstimme* with force and eloquence; with fulsome beard, he made Charlton Heston look mighty puny.

Concert Note

Moses und Aron, by Arnold Schoenberg, at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Center, Chicago.

Perhaps New York audiences got the better deal with the near-simultaneous performances of Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* that took place at the Met and in Chicago. At the concert performances of Schoenberg's opera, Chicago audiences missed out on the Met's cable-version debaucheries in the Golden Calf scene and other stage business that can enliven—or divert one from—the gnarled, less-than-tuneful score. Certainly, the pristine objectivity of Pierre Boulez and the turn-on-a-dime virtuosity of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus heard at Symphony Center allowed one, for better or worse, to concentrate on the Austrian composer's music.

Schoenberg's star ascended when the postwar Darmstadt musical leaders took up serialism as their god, and it has largely stayed there since due to their advocacy. Yet even today, while the composer enjoys the support of all the "important" musical people and his works are semi-regular fare with the major orchestras, Schoenberg's music remains more respected than liked, noted more for challenging innovation and ingenuity than for intrinsic musical and expressive depths.

To many of the younger generation of audiences, musicians, and critics, there is something a little quaint about the espousal of Schoenberg's serial works by former musical revolutionaries now in their sixties and seventies. One sometimes gets the impression of serialism being a kind of musical Nehru jacket, donned with great ceremony by the Darmstadt grandees believing themselves to be hip and cutting edge, when in fact they are fighting a war long since ended by attrition, with younger composers largely forsaking the preceding generation's musical tastes for a more tonal idiom.

Ingenious as it is, Schoenberg's twelve-tone system today seems like the musical equivalent of the Georges Perec novel written without using the letter "e"; you marvel at the execution and accomplishment, while wondering why so much ingenuity was put at the expense of such an awkward and self-defeating exercise. It's one of the great ironies of music that Schoenberg's pupils—Alban Berg in his beautiful, deeply felt Violin Concerto and even Anton Webern in his atom-blasting miniatures—found a way to make serialism accommodate traditional tonality and individual expression that largely eluded the man who created it.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's best playing in recent years has often come under the leadership of Pierre Boulez, the unlikely marriage between the lucid, coolly analytical French conductor-composer and the roiling

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power and sonorous heft of this most German of American orchestras striking sparks in the intriguing musical programs devised by Boulez. The CSO has had more experience with *Moses und Aron* than most American orchestras, Sir Georg Solti having performed it with them on two occasions (1971 and 1984, the latter concerts resulting in a well-received recording). "Sing it like you are singing Brahms," the late conductor exhorted the chorus at his rehearsals, and the warm, richly sung, and rhythmically taut performance remains one of the most committed on disc (regrettably currently out-of-print). Pierre Boulez's 1996 recording for Deutsche Gramophone with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra forms a neat contrast with Solti's set, the former's performance characteristic in its gleaming detail, clarity of orchestral timbres, and lack of tension with a whiff of the static lecture occasionally palpable.

As Bernard Holland put it in *The New York Times*, *Moses und Aron* is a work still regarded with unease, and every fifteen years or so someone will "poke it with a stick just to make sure it is still alive." One must confess that there were moments in the first act when this audience member wanted to call the sanitation department to come with a shovel and expeditiously remove the carcass from the street. *Moses und Aron* is extremely heavy-going; the dense musical argument, stubborn absence of repeated notes, and anything resembling thematic memorability make it a very tough listen.

And yet, and yet . . . if one can make it through to Act II, there are moments of undeniable dramatic power and expressive force, which were given their full impact by the scrupulously prepared Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus under Boulez's lucid direction. Yet it was due in no small part to the artistry of Chris Merritt as Aron and David Pittman-Jennings as Moses—both soloists reprising their roles from Boulez's DG recording—that lifted these performances to such a high level. As Moses, Pittman-Jennings declaimed the largely *sprechstimme* part with the implacable force of an Old Testament patriarch, his clarion baritone and dignified pomposity fully suited to the role. The tenor Chris Merritt was an even greater revelation in the more "lyrical" role of Aron. Best known for his Rossini and bel canto repertoire—and a singer who, in this listener's experience, has always been something of a dull stick on stage—Merritt brought an electrifying and compelling intensity to the role, his idiomatic delivery and characterful stage presence transcending the concert milieu. With elaborate hand gestures and vocal inflections, Merritt's delivery of Aron's more musical phrases, and the smiling satisfaction and wry bemusement with which he would turn, listen, and acknowledge the chorus's praising of Aron and questioning of Moses, helped enormously to put this performance across. Indeed, the pointed delivery and riveting drama in Aron's confrontations with Moses in Act II were done most effectively with crackling theatrical tension.

Boulez's direction of the orchestra and chorus was all one would expect, eliciting refined textures and cystalline balances. Yet the French conductor also put forth a less characteristic (for him) power and forceful intensity in the frenzied Act II scene with the Golden Calf receiving playing and singing of dizzying virtuosity. The CSO Chorus was remarkable, rendering all of its varied and demanding assignments with strength, projection, and clarity, whether angrily muttering imprecations after forty days in the desert, venting their wrath upon Moses, beseeching, or in prayerful supplication.

Schoenberg's uncompleted opera may have turned out to be the twentieth-century's musical Golden Calf: a shiny, shimmering false god that promised salvation only to lead the people—i.e., composers and musicians—astray. Still, given performances as thoroughly committed as this, *Moses und Aron* will live on, an important musical document that will forever intrigue, exasperate, and fascinate future generations.

—*Lawrence A. Johnson*

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The media

Caring, compassionate imperialism

by James Bowman

In all the media's coverage of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, there was hardly a mention of the word "imperialism." Since the last European empires dismembered themselves in the 1960s and 1970s, the media mind, addicted to the short-term view, has come to believe that a part of human history for as long as there has been any human history has become merely *démodé*. Perhaps influenced by Lenin's characterization of imperialism as "the final stage of capitalism," journalists have been disposed to believe it a mere contingency of international relations, the product of the greed and power-hunger of the usual suspects (those ol' debbil white males) among the ruling classes in the old European capitals. The rare consensus on this subject, foreshadowed in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and League of Nations and enshrined in today's United Nations, was owing to the harmony between America's anti-imperial national mythology and Marxist-Leninist theory.

Of course, when the United States engineered a coup in Guatemala or Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest or Prague, the act was often visible as imperial only to the anti-imperialists on the other side, but the media were naturally quick to rise above such merely national partisanship and anathematize all the world's residue of imperialism as the result of America's conduct of the Cold War. With this new war—actually, as I write, it is still only a half-war, since the combatants on our side are almost all machines—new categories are obviously necessary. Not that there is any mystery about the absence of the media's reflexive hostility to the exercise of American military power on this occasion. The excellent folks at Brent Bozell's Media Research Center have put together an amusing selection of quotations about our various military adventures since the end of the Vietnam War, revealing that (for example) *The Washington Post* referred to the invasion of Grenada as a "conquest," NBC suggested that President Reagan's support for the Nicaraguan contras would result in a disaster like Vietnam and Afghanistan, CBS called President Bush's invasion of Panama "reckless," and, of course, lots of people deplored the expenditure of "blood for oil" in the Gulf War.

Do you think the fact that the president leading us to war in Kosovo is a Democrat might have anything to do with the absence of such dissenting voices—except among a few right-wing commentators—today? Where are the skeptics now: those like Bob Simon of CBS, who said after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August, 1990, that "While Americans say they're moving tonight in support of little nations, that's not how it will be perceived or described over here. From the poor people in these little nations, Americans will hear these old phrases, old accusations: gunboat diplomacy, imperialism, the arrogance of power."

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In 1990, Dan Rather asked Saddam Hussein: "Mr. President, do you think this is a Vietnam in the sand for the United States?" In 1999, he asked Bill Clinton, "Mr. President, . . . I'm told by those close to you that you have a lot of pent up feelings about what's happening in the Balkans, what we're doing there. Can you share some of that with us?"

It is not that the media is gung-ho for the war. They are nearly as hesitant and uncertain about it as polls suggest the population at large is. But, as Dan Rather's question reveals, their natural liberal and Democratic sympathies induce them to give the Clinton administration the benefit of every doubt. In addition, Slobodan Milosevic seems to be lacking in Saddam Hussein's media savvy, since he ordered Western reporters out of the country at gunpoint with the opening of hostilities. (Though someone must have told him a couple of weeks later that he'd be a fool not to let Rather set up his cameras in Belgrade.) Imagine what a propaganda victory he might have scored during the weeks of bombing if the world had been seeing ragged Serbian widows and orphans standing in front of bombed-out buildings on CNN every day as it was going on. But Slobo is a proud man who declines to stoop and so has left all the humanitarian arguments—which are the only arguments that the media understands—in NATO's arsenal.

This is yet another piece of good fortune for Bill Clinton, whose presidency does nothing that is not pitched to the media's sensibility. Even more than other American presidents, he must justify a blatantly imperial adventure in solely humanitarian terms—though, because he fancies himself as an intellectual (also a media plus), he did make some laughable attempts near the beginning to justify his actions in terms of *Realpolitik*. In a speech to the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Clinton waxed hyperbolic:

> The whole twentieth century is in large measure the story of slaughter that started in Europe. World War I started in the Balkans, in Bosnia, next door to Kosovo. World War II engulfed the Balkans. The Cold War saw the Balkans where Kosovo is, at the edge of the Communist empire, and the clash of Slavic civilization with European Muslims and others.
>
> Now if we have learned anything after the Cold War and our memories of World War II, it is that if our country is going to be prosperous and secure, we need a Europe that is safe, secure, free, united, a good partner with us for trading . . . and someone who will share the burdens of taking care of the problems of the world. . . . That's what this Kosovo thing is all about.

Though widely ridiculed for the intellectual sloppiness of such a rationale (Charles Krauthammer wrote that "for incoherence and simple-mindedness, for disorganization and sheer intellectual laziness" the speech was "unmatched in recent American history"), Clinton repeated it, in slightly tidied-up form, in his address to the nation on the commencement of the bombing.

> Sarajevo, the capital of neighboring Bosnia, is where World War I began. World War II and the Holocaust engulfed this region. In both wars, Europe was slow to recognize the dangers, and the United States waited even longer to enter the conflicts. Just imagine if leaders back then had acted wisely and early enough. How many lives could have been saved? How many Americans would not have had to die?

Presumably if Austria-Hungary had only had a few cruise missiles with which to bomb Belgrade instead of issuing an ultimatum in 1914, the millions dead in the trenches would have been spared.

Yet ludicrous as this argument sounds, it is only a slight variation on the more frequently repeated one of "genocide." Of course, the rhetoric of the administration in calling attention to Serbian atrocities among the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo was

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simply beside the point. In how many parts of the world do we see similar atrocities taking place? Even as the bombing of the oppressors of the Kosovars was proceeding, the Dayaks and Malays of Borneo were massacring Madurans while Indonesian government troops were massacring—not for the first time!—East Timorese. Tough luck, you Madurans and East Timorese! Civil wars in Sierra Leone and the Sudan and a border war between Ethiopia and its former province Eritrea killed thousands. No one thought these American or NATO problems. Too bad, you Fuzzy-Wuzzies!

Also as the bombs fell, the president who likened the evil Slobo to Hitler was welcoming—with a state dinner at the White House the Chinese premier—Zhu Rongji, a man who tortures and executes political opponents, who represents a regime that has done far worse things to the Tibetans than Milosevic has done to the Kosovars, and who presides over a system of forced-labor camps to dwarf the old Soviet Gulag. That's the way the cookie crumbles, Tibetans and Chinese dissidents! Not only was their oppressor welcome at the White House, but also Clinton warned that "As the next presidential election approaches, we cannot allow a healthy argument to lead us toward a campaign-driven Cold War with China"—something which would create a "climate of mistrust that . . . undermines the exchanges that are opening China to the world."

Of course there is nothing easier than criticizing this kind of hypocrisy. I remember when Mrs. Thatcher made her deal with the Chinese in 1984 for the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, her relative squishiness on that occasion was often contrasted, particularly on the right, with her firmness when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands two years before. As if the relative size of the Chinese and Argentinian armed forces should have played no part in the considerations of a principled foreign policy! President Clinton, too, made an oblique reference to such irreducible realities when he said in his AFSCME speech that "America as the world's superpower ought to be standing up against ethnic cleansing *if we have the means to do it* and we have allies who will help us to do it in their neighborhood" (emphasis added).

But did we have the means to do it? Militarily we did, undoubtedly. Politically we did not. Clinton implicitly acknowledged the fact when he announced at the beginning that "I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war." This was widely regarded as a strategic blunder, likely to embolden Milosevic to wait out the bombing and continue with ethnic cleansing, secure in the knowledge that he was unassailable on the ground. Yet it was only a statement of the obvious. Milosevic is enough of a politician to know without being told that Clinton is enough of a politician to have thus to reassure the media and his own political base, whose ideas of American war-making were formed by the conflict in Vietnam—and the protests against it. It wasn't as if the present tense ("I do not intend. . .") didn't give him (characteristically) a way out of his implied promise.

Milosevic may even have been smart enough to realize that the real purpose of the bombing was not to deter him from continuing his oppression of the Kosovars. Even an inept diplomat like Madeleine Albright could not have been completely blind to the fact that it was likely to do no such thing—if not that bombing was likely to make, as in fact it did make, that oppression much worse. No, all careful observers of the Clinton administration over the past six years must have realized that the bombs were falling and the missiles were flying solely in order to make the good intentions of President Bill and his compassionate and caring administration, and his caring and compassionate allies, manifest to the world. In short, it was as much a media event as everything else the President does—publicly, at any rate.

To be sure, every modern president must act as he watches himself being watched,

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and his hopes of continuing in power depend on his continuing to look good. But the absence of any obvious imperial rationale, such as President Reagan had in Nicaragua or President Bush in Kuwait, has left us with *nothing but* the media campaign. After more than two weeks of bombing which had been at best useless and at worst counterproductive, *The Washington Post* announced [April 10th]: "U.S. Steps Up Rhetorical Fight." Take that, Slobo! "The administration launched a new rhetorical offensive yesterday against the Serb-led Yugoslav government, accusing its soldiers of systematically raping and murdering ethnic Albanian women in Kosovo and vowing to press on with NATO bombing raids despite warnings from Russian President Boris Yeltsin." So hooray for our boys in suits! Let's hear it for the heroic spinners brigade! This is postmodern war-making, one supposes. Just "launch" your passive-aggressive "offensive" by pointing out the sufferings being caused by your enemy and hope that by doing so you will make him feel really bad.

But a careful look at the evidence compiled in the government study called "The Ethnic Cleansing of Kosovo," as summarized by the *Post*'s reporters Vernon Loeb and R. Jeffrey Smith, revealed slaughter on something less than a genocidal scale. Though the report mentions "mass executions" and "mass rape," it is pretty vague when it comes to numbers and even more vague about confirmed numbers. Reports of the deaths of "more than 100 men and boys" at Velika Krusa were said to be "apparently corroborated" while in the course of a mass rape of women near Djakovica "as many as 20 may have been killed." Moreover, there are "three reported sites of mass graves that hold more than 180 people and 50 villages and towns where mass executions have reportedly occurred," and "another 112 men were allegedly shot and burned" at Malakrusa.

Even if we discount all the "may have beens" and "reportedlies" and "allegedlies" and assume that all these figures are firm, the summary's total still comes to under 1000 dead. These are not exactly Holocaust-like numbers. Unlike the precision bombs and guided missiles of the military offensive, the rhetorical offensive seems to have been rather sloppily put together. But even for so august a representative of the respectable media as *The Washington Post*, it was enough for the report to proclaim with characteristic vagueness that "as many as several hundred thousand ethnic Albanian men may have been detained or harmed by Yugoslav government security forces in the past three weeks." Or, then again, they may not have been.

In a larger sense, however, the rhetorical offensive makes perfect sense. The war is a war of rhetoric, by rhetoric and for rhetoric: namely that of the internationalist, anti-imperialist, humanitarian media consensus which makes it impossible for politicians to acknowledge the real reasons for such an action—if there are any. Being the politician he is, Clinton might well have reasoned that, because of geography, logistics, and European support, he could pound the hell out of Milosevic for a few weeks without paying any political price—which was true—and that this just might be enough to bend him to our will—which was not. But why should this administration, which stood by and did nothing when close to a million Tutsis in Rwanda were massacred by their Hutu fellow-countrymen, have chosen *this* eruption of violence and disorder in the world as the occasion for launching its cruise missiles? Could it have had something to do with the fact that both the victims and their oppressors were white Europeans and thus would play better than dusky Rwandans in the living rooms of America?

I only ask because I do not know, and because questioning the motives of our leaders, like so many other things these days, does not seem to hint of scandal anymore. At any rate, Jacob Weisberg seems to think it not particularly discreditable of Clinton and his generals to have gone to

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war to make themselves feel better and because they were inspired by the movies. Writing in *The New York Times Magazine*, he noticed how the administration's and its apologists' frequently drawn parallel with the Second World War could be connected to the recent vogue for films about that war (*Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*) and to Tom Brokaw's best-selling book and TV show about "The Greatest Generation." "Once again," he writes, "we're fighting alongside our allies to stop an expansionist power and forestall the mass murder of a helpless ethnic minority. In the analogy, Milosevic is a low-rent Hitler; his ethnic cleansing, a B-movie Holocaust."

> Of course, the suggestion that America's main goal was to save Jews from Hitler is the revisionist product of a post-Holocaust consciousness. But the larger image is not irrelevant. Because in many ways our involvement in Kosovo is an expression of the same theme that informs Brokaw's book and Spielberg's movie. Just beneath the surface, these works simmer with the self-doubt of the children of the World War II vets, who never heard a simple call for sacrifice, even when their turn came in Vietnam. As baby boomers and as Democrats, Clinton and his contemporaries—Spielberg among them—are still looking for a chance to show their bona fides, to prove that it was the Vietnam War that they objected to, not the risk and sacrifice of war per se. In this sense, nostalgia for World War II seems less an expression of regret about the past than a yearning for the clear moral imperative their generation never faced.

Weisberg claims not to be offering up arguments against intervention in Kosovo, only "against a sentimental intervention." But any intervention must be a sentimental intervention without any clear idea of the permanent imperial position of the U.S. *vis à vis* Europe which might justify it—which probably means that, absent the rivalry of the "evil empire," we can never again really know why we are doing *anything* in foreign policy.

Or rather, that sentimental interventions must henceforth be just the tip of a sentimental iceberg, of which the appealingly progressive-minded "Third Way" is the submerged nine-tenths. Clinton, Tony Blair, and Gerhard Schröder are the Three Musketeers of sentimental liberalism, and they are leading the rest of NATO into battle merely to advertise to the rest of the world that, so long as it is convenient to them and does not exact too high a political price, they will continue to disregard the claims of national sovereignty in the interests of bigger markets and nicer, less warlike, more commercial people everywhere. The same kind of *bien pensant* liberalism was also on display in the detention of General Augusto Pinochet in Britain last autumn, confirmed by the British Law Lords on the day the bombing began.

It is, no doubt, an imperialism for our time. President Clinton may be doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, but it is not—*pace* Senator John McCain and other Republicans who support the war—unimportant to ask how wrong the reasons are. So far, Clinton has managed to come up with nothing more compelling than a Rodney King-like wish that people might "get along" (Be nice or die!) and some amateur psychologizing about why they can't. Patriots should decline to support a president who would put at risk American (not to mention Yugoslav) lives with no more idea than that of why he is doing it.

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Books

Berryman at Shakespeare
by William Logan

John Berryman's Shakespeare problem first gripped him during the war, when he accepted a Rockefeller fellowship to work on a new edition of *King Lear*. Soon he was writing to his old teacher Mark Van Doren, "*Lear*'s renovation is going on rapidly & ruins me altogether for anything else. I am willing, however, to be destroyed in this cause." Eight years later, the project had changed, but the mania remained: "I haven't got any verse written—just Shakespeare, another hundred pages." And only the year before his death in 1972, having dunned the elderly Van Doren for a letter of reference for yet another fellowship, this time for a critical biography of Shakespeare, he received this bemused reply: "You will never finish the Shakespeare book. . . . You have this illusion that you're a scholar, but you know damn well you are nothing of the sort." Berryman cringed and blustered, but died without ever nearing the end of the Shakespeare, any Shakespeare.

Berryman in his obsession was different from Keats, who confronted the Bard on the divided ground of his syntax, the no-man's land of language. Keats wanted to conquer Shakespeare in the sins of his sentences, and when he referred to "Things real—such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakspeare," he *meant* it. Berryman's anxiety of influence was more knowing and more difficult. His sonnets (and clumsy sonnets they are) have a mistress as mysterious as Shakespeare's, but his *Dream Songs* are merely the shallow, troubled nightmares of a Caliban. The failures of scholarship are less wounding than failures of poetry, just as the successes are less ennobling: to be a scholar of Shakespeare is to live in the mortality of archives and libraries, to sift the dust of dust as protégé and epigone, but never to challenge Shakespeare on his own soil.

A precocious student at Columbia and Cambridge, Berryman had (unlike Falstaff) a Falstaffian appetite for work and overwork, and (like Falstaff) a cocksure belief in his gifts and hubris enough for a four-star general. The Thirties model of the heroic scholar was Housman, and Berryman wanted to out-Housman Housman (who toiled in the classical backwater of the poet Manilius) by turning his talents to a revolutionary edition of *Lear*—it hardly takes much Freud to see that such excess smells out a father figure somewhere. The most annihilating tragedy, the most intractable text, the supreme unfathomed poet—Top Bard, as Auden used to say. Scholarship is the reforming character of literature, and in its character more telling than a Rorschach test. Something needed to be proved.

Poetry is often a disabling condition for serious criticism (and vice versa); the skeletons of lost books litter the ground. Where is Delmore Schwartz's book on Eliot, announced and even advertised? Or Jarrell's book on Auden? Or Lowell's on American poetry? One reason modern poets *like* poet-

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ry is that most poems are short. Scholarship, like an epic poem, requires stamina—if modern poets had stamina, they'd be writing novels instead (Jarrell's one novel is one odd-duck exception to the failures).

Berryman once set out to read all the books Shakespeare read (a project, like most, left half complete) as well as the surviving English plays published between 1570 and 1614—over two hundred of them. The critical edition of *Lear* was never entirely abandoned, but at various times he planned *Shakespeare: A Critical Biography*, *Plays of Shakespeare*, *A Shakespeare Handbook*, *Shakespeare's Reading*, and *Shakespeare's Identity*, later retitled *Shakespeare's Reality*, a last attempt at biography. For most of these Berryman signed contracts and accepted advances, went into a mania of note-taking, issued optimistic reports (*Shakespeare's Reading*, of which apparently nothing exists worth publishing, was called "well advanced" in a cadging letter to the Guggenheim Foundation), became discouraged, then fell into silence. Berryman had a drudge's relish for tedium, but to finish a project is to declare an imperfection and submit to judgment. What Berryman sought wasn't judgment but exhaustion and redemption.

John Haffenden, Berryman's editor, has worked twenty years to extract the usable ruin of these projects. He faced thousands of pages of notes and drafts, and an inventory that ran to nearly a hundred pages. Scholarship ages faster than fashion (an E. K. Chambers is as rare as a Chanel), and Berryman so stalled publication of his few discoveries that other scholars displaced him. *Berryman's Shakespeare*[1] retrieves the insights of a brilliant critic who rarely found proper form for his criticism, and was crippled by his gifts. The editor has had to place himself back in the Forties and Fifties to understand Berryman's methods and motives; and in the masterly but long-winded introduction Haffenden has recreated the spirit in which Berryman undertook these massive, hopeless projects.

Berryman's Shakespeare includes fragments of the abandoned biographies; a splendid series of eight lectures on Shakespeare's development; essays on *Lear* with *disjecta membra* of the *Lear* edition; idiosyncratic (and completely mistaken) work on the mystery of Mr. W. H.; and a handful of brief, ill-calculated sketches mostly destined for the abandoned *Handbook*. Four of the best pieces (including his most important essay, "Shakespeare at Thirty") were contained in the remarkable collection of Berryman's criticism, *The Freedom of the Poet* (1976).

Lear first. All texts of Shakespeare are a compromise with disorder, but *Lear* is the most troubled. It comes to us in three versions, a Quarto of 1608 (Q); a reprint of 1619 fraudulently misdated 1608 (Q2); and the Folio edition of 1623. The text of Q is confused, badly lineated (verse is prose; prose verse), nearly unreadable in places. Q2 has no independent authority, so far as we know, but someone corrected a few of Q's obvious errors even as reprinting introduced new ones. The Folio is very different from the Quartos and probably derives from a later playhouse version, cutting some three hundred lines and one entire scene, adding a hundred new lines, changing many readings. Worse, for an editor, the Folio was set from a scribbled-over copy of Q2, or Q, or a revised transcript of Q, or even a combination—the scholars are still at war. For years these texts were taken as butchered versions of some grander *Lear*, and married willy-nilly according to the editor's taste.

Berryman entered the quarrel over *Lear* attracted by the troubled nature of Q. What caused its bizarre confusions? Theories at the time held that its errors were due not just to sloppy compositors and a near-sighted press corrector, but because it was either a "memorial reconstruction," dictated by actors who had lost or temporarily mis-

1 *Berryman's Shakespeare*, by John Berryman (edited by John Haffenden); Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 396 pages, $30.

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laid the manuscript (perhaps while on a provincial tour), or a shorthand report taken down from the theater stalls in order to pirate the play. Shorthand writers existed—playwrights and theater owners feared them. The theories have moved on, and many scholars now think Q was taken from Shakespeare's foul papers, and the Folio was Shakespeare's later revision. The two incompatible versions leave us with an indeterminate postmodern *Lear*. (It's an attractive if trendy theory; but I have doubts—the problems of Q still look, as they did to Berryman half a century ago, like textual decay, not rough draft.)

These problems gave Berryman deadly opportunity. An edition of any Shakespeare play is a labor, and five years is commonly accounted reasonable time to edit a common play. A certain personality should never go anywhere near such temptation; and *Lear* is the greatest tar pit of all, with its contrary versions, murky readings, dubious line-breaks, and endless chance for commentary. Berryman saw the fearsome difficulty: "One must emend through the error to the copy, and through that to the actor, hoping to reach Shakespeare." He was soon happy in the tar, firing off letters to his teacher Van Doren ("One of the strongholds of corruption in *Lear* fell I think this morning"), and casting letters across the Atlantic to the elderly scholar W. W. Greg, the old master of *Lear* study, who encouraged him with a cheery, riding-to-hounds "Good hunting!"

It hardly matters, at this distance, what toils Berryman put himself through over each crux. The Quarto reads "My father poorelie,leed," and that reading is taken over by Q2 and the Folio, though a corrected sheet of Q reads "parti,eyd." The press corrector saw something, or thought he saw something, in the secretary hand before him. Berryman proposed "bloody-eyed," then "parti-eyed," then "emptie-ey'd," and later "pearly-ey'd." Months went by, each close study leading to close study—and this for dozens of other problems howling for attention, most of them trivial to the reader weeping over Gloucester's blindness, Cordelia's hanging, and *Lear*'s "Howl, howl, howl!," but each offering narrow access to Shakespeare's hand scrawling across foolscap four centuries ago. Scholarship is often the quest writ small, writ very small.

A man who stares too long at a corrupt passage can begin to imagine anything. If he's conservative he'll keep the words as they are, but derive wilder and wilder meanings for what has been corrupted past sense. If he's radical, as Berryman often was, his eye will devise stranger and stranger alternatives for words printed on the page, until each word is entirely transformed, *short* becoming *fowl*, *store* becoming *scorn*. We will never achieve satisfaction for much of the corruption in Shakespeare, and we can be sure of only two things: there is corruption in many lines that look perfectly innocent, and sense to be had in words where we smell corruption. Berryman's absorption in minutiae makes every difficulty moral—very few scholars are as able to convey the thrill of intellectual job work. He knew how little the plays and poems could reveal of the man who wrote them, but was aware that some trace of actual life bears its burden into art:

> One is asked to see William Shakespeare looking around for a subject for his next play, either quite at random or at the dictates of opportunism. One is asked to imagine a poet entirely unlike any other major poet we know. . . . One notices at once that the father-dominated tragedy, *Hamlet*, must have been finally handled by the poet at a time very close to the death of his father in 1600 and that the mother-dominated tragedy, *Coriolanus*, must have been written close to the death of his mother in 1609, but upon examination each of the cases bristles with difficulties.

Though Berryman breaks off this essay on "The Conceiving of *King Lear*," as far too many of these essays are broken off, he sees Shakespeare with fewer of the coral accretions of scholarship. This Shakespeare might have been drawn to subjects because

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he was a man, not an institution—a man in dirty linen, with a quill that needed sharpening, trying to write despite clamor in the street. Berryman notes King James's visit to Oxford in 1605, where the king liked a Latin playlet, devoted to his ancestor Banquo, in which women made prophecies. It was only thirty lines long, and the sole play he liked—he almost left another in the middle, hated a third, napped through a fourth, and avoided a fifth by visiting the library! Had Shakespeare observed this, or heard of it,

> he must have looked hard in his Holinshed and been thinking . . . of a short play about Macbeth that would include five characters from whom King James was directly descended, that would culminate in a great necromantic scene wherein all his royal ancestors would be shown, that would centre (though very indirectly) in *conscience*, a subject upon which James had strong views that were known because he had published a book on it [*Daemonologie*], and that would include of course witches, of which James had had absorbing experience in Scotland.

The comment on the king is droll—"James was proud of his learning, but he was primarily a hunter, and sleepy in the evening: he liked *short* plays." *Macbeth* is Shakespeare's shortest play. Berryman kept the past in focus within the present, and never forgot what we know by coming later, or what someone coming earlier, like Shakespeare, could *not* know. The passage above is drawn from his central achievement, eight lectures on the development of Shakespeare's mind and art. In small they can be quarreled with—Berryman took liberties with his biographical notions, as Empson did, often reading too much, though a shrewd (and psychological) too much, into the obsessions of the plays. In Berryman's philosophy, Shakespeare was made a tragic playwright by two devastating crises, and *Hamlet* invents an imagined life for his dead little son Hamnet.

Such organic comprehension of the spoils of language is possible, if only with difficulty plausible, when we have the life (the diaries, letters, the closed phenomena of existence) and literature in parallel form, as Berryman found in Stephen Crane, whose biography he was no doubt able to complete because Crane died at twenty-eight. In Shakespeare, the life is mostly a superstitious blank—a glint here and there, gossip from decades after his death, stories so much like lies they must sometimes tell the truth. Berryman invents a life from the hypothesized order of the plays; and it is an inspired life, but a fictional life. One beetle of fact would down the house of cards. You can't derive from a purely hypothetical order of plays (plays later perhaps revised) an orderly psychology of inspiration. You can only mark the effects of the writer's execution, how in executive use the local event, thwarted desire, and half-realized anxiety become the reticulation of art.

> These are the sonnets of a young man, probably; their chief defect a certain indifference to how things wind up, so that most of the couplets are weak; their chief virtues expressiveness and violent power. Some of the very simplest . . . are among the best; and in general, despite their tiresome (though justified) claims to immortality, they strike one as proceeding from a man more or less without a pose—roughly, naked; not to speak of the humiliating privacy of some of their subject matter, which is quite different from the matter of all the other Elizabethan sonneteers.

Berryman's brusqueness has the vanity of good sense. In his ravenous reading he was naked before literature, his virtues grounded in a scholar's note-gathering as well as a reader's appreciations, even when appreciation was touched with Bardolatry ("this poet's phrases will drag at our profoundest thought as if, truly, we overheard the soul of the world murmuring truths to herself"—"Reader, I married him," you half expect Berryman to say). The ant and the grasshopper possess different kinds of genius. There is the genius that gathers, that exhausts itself in accumulation (a genius of

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mastery that never finds use for everything stored away), and the genius that exhausts itself in discharge (a genius of insight that leaves nothing wasted—indeed, that sometimes seems not to have accumulated much, if anything, before the discharge). This is the difference between a Berryman and a Lowell (or a Jonson and a Shakespeare, for that matter), though in his hungry insight Berryman could sometimes be a grasshopper, too.

As a psychology, Berryman is often transparent. What interested him was how Shakespeare produced what he produced—the finicky work on cruces was only the medium of this understanding. Berryman closely watched, for example, how old Shakespeare was when he wrote, and the pressure of this analysis lies in anxiety over his own achievement—thirty-six, the approximate age when Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, seems old to a man of twenty and young to a man of fifty. Berryman often felt he had not accomplished enough, that until his mid-forties high promise had yielded meager result. Shakespeare had finished most of his great work before Berryman had even begun.

Such attention leads him into whimsies (it seems unlikely that Shakespeare's "sudden interest in human physiology" in *Coriolanus* and *Timon* was owed to conversation with his new son-in-law, a doctor). In passage after passage, however, on Shakespeare's "sex nausea"; on his portrayal of wives ("not notably sympathetic"); on the notion that Shakespeare revolutionized the length of the Elizabethan play; or that the young actor might have started playwriting casually, by improving parts (this would make Richard Greene's insults more comprehensible), the vividness of Berryman's thinking, however prone to exaggeration or histrionics, shows that immersion in Shakespeare goes deeper than instinct. Only a scrupulous and determining critic could have seen that the sonnets mention acting but never playwriting (possibly affecting their date), that Shakespeare's "most familiar pronouncements on human life . . . in context are *ironic*," that until his mother is dead Hamlet can't kill Claudius. All these passages, and others too dense for the précis of a phrase, show a critic with the sustained power and application of Coleridge, but more wounded than Coleridge. Each was victim of addiction and depression, feelings of unworthiness and sloth.

Haffenden, who has also written a usable if not penetrating biography of Berryman, has done with this midden of old paper what could be done. He should have left out the piece on "Shakespeare's Early Comedy," which has little about comedy and much repeated elsewhere. Berryman, for all his appetite and wide reading, often returned to the same scenes and speeches to make his points (an example from Henry VI, Part II is used at least four times)—indeed, later essays often cannibalize the earlier. The last part of the book is a disappointment, short essays that don't come to the point, if they have a point—some are just lists of sources. The piece on the sonnets has a lovely description of a sonnet's action, but descends into mumpish fact and opinion, like lecture notes put into a compactor. Only when writing on *King John* and to a lesser extent *Macbeth* does the older Berryman seem engaged. The last piece in the book, *Shakespeare's Reality*, all that remains of his late "critical biography," is autocratic, confused, a rambling embarrassment that shows how far, in the end he was from completing anything publishable.

Each poet honors the Bard in a different way—Dryden by adaptation, Pope and Johnson in the labor of editing, William Henry Ireland by forgery, Keats by hero worship, Eliot by avoidance, or absorption. Berryman's work on Shakespeare is wreckage, a group of mutilated essays; and such fragmentary achievement shows why he was no scholar—he worked by enthusiasms, and only as long as enthusiasm held out. His overcalculation of means knew the romance of ambition: the desperation to make discoveries, to do what no other scholar had

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been able to do, was also the weakness of his poetry, which strained too often for original effect and ended sounding like baby talk. Little wonder Berryman was attracted to Macbeth—"double-natured, heroic, uncertainly wicked, both loyal and faithless, meditative and violent, and *does* know what he is getting into." Berryman was a brilliant critic for the same reason he was a failed scholar: a megalomaniac can rule his insights like a kingdom, but never be able to kneel to the imperfection scholarship demands.

Shakespeare was the last writer who didn't have to contend with Shakespeare. It's an old notion: most poets have read so much about him, have read so much of him, it's difficult to remember how little, in comparison, Shakespeare read of anything. He had his Ovid, and his Holinshed, and other books besides; but they would make a small shelf compared to our vast libraries, or just the libraries on him that annually pour from the press. He had to read—lucky man!—none of them, had to face only a few short references to his career, some wives' tales and rumor, a few sly insults and jokes. He never suffered the Shakespeare problem that has entangled poets since.

A family album

Pat Barker Another World.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 278 pages, $25

reviewed by Brooke Allen

The last couple of decades have produced a lot of loose talk about the "dysfunctional family," whatever that might be. Every time a definition is attempted, its vagueness and generality point to the inevitable conclusion that there really is no such thing as a family that is *not* dysfunctional. Some families, to be sure, get along passably; but only permanent citizens of Cloud-Cuckooland would contend that love unalloyed by rage or jealousy can exist between any two family members.

Still, some clans are definitely more dysfunctional than others, and when emotions build to a crescendo there can develop a situation that amounts to a sort of war, whether it be declared outright or merely a cold one. It is fitting, therefore, that Pat Barker, who has written perhaps the best war novels of her generation, should now turn her attention to the subtler hostilities of family life.

With her *Regeneration* trilogy—*Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1996)—Barker established herself as one of the foremost novelists in Britain. But those who are strongest at showing us the gore of the battlefield are not necessarily those best equipped to chronicle the repressed, unspectacular skirmishes of the domestic front. *Another World*, though, Barker's first novel since the trilogy, is resounding testimony to the breadth and durability of her fictional powers.

Nick's family has reached a crisis point, one that will sound familiar to a good many modern parents. It is a cobbled-together family unit: Nick and Fran have both been married before, and have brought their children—as well as the unhappy histories of their previous, failed unions—into the new household. They also have a two-year-old of their own, Jasper, and still another bun in the oven.

The center is not holding. Nick's adolescent daughter Miranda is silent, affectless, withholding. Her mother, Nick's ex-wife, has been hospitalized with a depression brought on by the breakup of her marriage two or three years ago. What Miranda feels about it all, whom she blames, is something she will never disclose. She allows her father a little love, but doesn't give an inch to her step-family or her baby brother.

Fran's eleven-year-old son Gareth seems to be in even deeper trouble. With no friends, no focus, he spends most of his time playing grotesque computer games: "*Crash, Fighting Force, Mortal Kombat, Shock Riot, Alien Trilogy, Rage, Streetfighter*." He throws violent temper tantrums in public

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places, uncontrolled displays of rage that his mother has neither the time nor the strength to deal with properly. She lets it slide, mostly out of guilt for having messed things up with Gareth's father: "She's failed, at any rate, in what seems to be a woman's chief duty to her son: to equip him with a father who's more than a bipedal sperm bank." In the back of her mind she knows that Gareth's behavior is not normal, but she can't put in the effort that this acknowledgment would demand for between them little Jasper and the unborn baby are "eating her alive."

Nick knows he ought to help ease the tension, but, as is so often the case with stepparents, there is no clear path for him. As Nick sees it, Fran continually goads him "into acting like Gareth's father—his 'real' father, whatever that means—and [he is] then choked off the moment he attempts it." He feels neutered; she is furious and resentful.

Nick has distractions of his own that keep him from pulling his weight at the moment, for he is caught up in the final, fatal illness of his grandfather, Geordie, a reserved centenarian whose odd emotional bond with Nick has always made him seem more father than grandfather. As he approaches his end, Geordie, a veteran of World War I, is increasingly haunted by his war experiences and by the death of his brother in the trenches. Nick spends many hours and even nights at Geordie's bedside, knowing that he is needed at home but unable to pull himself away.

At the opening of the novel things have reached such a pitch that the family members seem quite literally to hate each other. Nick is repelled by Fran, with her "drained face, the huge belly, the skinny, sharp-boned cat-with-too-many-litters look." Fran gloats whenever she can make Nick feel really guilty about some dereliction of duty. The children silently simmer.

Then, while the family is scraping off wallpaper in preparation for repainting the living room, they discover a hidden mural. It is a group portrait, a hostile and sinister representation of the Victorian Fanshawe family who built the house. Paterfamilias, with an erect penis emerging from undone fly. Sour-faced mother, breasts exposed. Elder son and daughter. Small boy. "Even without the exposed penis, the meticulously delineated and hated breasts, you'd have sensed the tension in this family, with the golden-haired toddler at its dark centre." It is Miranda who finally says what they are all thinking: "It's us."

The Fanshawe family, Nick discovers, had as tragic a story as their portrait implies. William Fanshawe was a local munitions magnate whose youngest child, the little boy of the portrait, was gruesomely and mysteriously murdered at the age of two. The only suspects were the two older children, and although a court of law found them innocent for lack of evidence, they were always thought to have committed the crime. Years later the son, Robert, was killed on the first day of the Somme; his sister Muriel lived into old age, avoided by the neighbors and used as a bogey to frighten local children. A letter from Robert to his sister, written shortly before he died, urged her, cryptically, to "*Remember how young we were.*" Nick keeps his discoveries secret from his family, but the message of the portrait is strong enough for them, like the reader, to get the analogy.

It is at this point that the seemingly disparate threads of Barker's plot—Geordie's agony over the memory of his brother Harry, the Fanshawes' dreadful story, Gareth's furtive, vicious attacks on little Jasper—come together into a single theme: sibling rivalry. Siblings do not just get annoyed with one another; they *hate* one another. Frequently, they would like to kill one another. Geordie says as much in an interview with a historian friend, who resists his dark vision: "But that's a child's hatred, Geordie. Kids are always saying they hate people, they wish they were dead, but they don't mean it. They don't act on it." Geordie disagrees. "They don't get the chance, do they, most of the time?"

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The analogies become more insistent. On a family trip to the beach one day, Gareth looks at Miranda and, for the first time, intuits her real feelings. "Something about her expression startles him. He understands suddenly that if Miranda did what she wanted she'd knock the sand castle over and jump up and down on the ruin. She'd scream and shout and kick sand into all their faces. . . . [H]e backs away. She's no right to feel like that. He's the one who wants to smash things."

As the afternoon wears on, the adults doze and the children are left to their own devices. Jasper squats by a little stream, playing boats. Gareth watches him, nearly distraught. Part of him would like to join Jasper's game; but the other part wins, and, thinking himself unobserved, he begins to hurl rocks at his brother.

Another World is written with all the suspense of a thriller, and so to reveal whether or not Jasper is killed would be unfair to both readers and author. In any case, by the end of the novel the reader is confronted with many more questions than answers. Was Gareth's intent, and that of Robert and Muriel Fanshawe, truly murderous? Was the girl Gareth saw standing silently above him as he threw the stones his sister Miranda, or a trick of the sun conjured up by his own wish for a partner in crime—or Muriel Fanshawe's ghost? How does one weigh the evident good in both Miranda and Gareth against their violent impulses? Is it true, as Geordie insists, that all siblings would kill if they had a chance? So far as family life goes, do really bad times, when spouses actively dislike each other, in fact make up a normal and even inevitable part of marriage?

In her subtle combination of Nick's family story with those of Geordie and of the Fanshawes, Barker links impulse with history, the sins of the fathers against their children with the sins of the fatherland against its sons. William Fanshawe made his fortune in the war industry, the same industry that would eventually kill his son Robert—a son who murdered his brother but whom, nevertheless, the father helplessly loved. He honors both boys in the same memorial, engraving it with Kipling's verse, "*If any question why we died,/ Tell them, because our fathers lied.*" "A bitter epitaph," as Nick reflects, "though there's nothing surprising about that. Fanshawe had lost two sons, why wouldn't he be bitter? What's strange is the determined linking of the two deaths, the conviction of guilt for both."

Like Robert, Geordie, it turns out, is both victim and potential villain: he gave the final blow to his brother Harry, who had just been mortally wounded in the trenches for the sake of a worthless cause. A mercy killing, obviously. But Geordie, who alone knew how much he hated the brother his mother had always favored, sees it differently. After eighty years, he is still the ghostly remnant of an unresolved past, as is Harry's son Geoffrey, now "a frail old man, leaning on a stick," once a little boy who had never known his own father and who looked up to his Uncle Geordie as a hero.

Pat Barker is capable of getting across a powerful message with the absolute minimum of rhetoric, one of the rarest gifts a writer can be blessed with. The surface simplicity of her method conceals, then slowly reveals, a narrative with all the richness and complexity of a symphony. *Another World* is pure pleasure—and pain—to read.

Choosing coarseness

Jeffrey Henderson, editor and translator
Aristophanes. Volume 1: Acharnians, Knights; 408 pages, $19.95.
Volume 2: Clouds, Wasps, Peace; 606 pages, $19.95. Loeb Classical Library/ Harvard University Press.

reviewed by Donald Lyons

The revitalization of the Loeb Classical Library continues apace, at least for some major Greek authors. Alongside Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones's Sophocles (complete), David

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Kovacs's Euripides (three volumes to date), and William H. Race's Pindar (complete), now arrive the first two volumes of Jeffrey Henderson's Aristophanes.

It is the general aim of these new Loeb editions to print a sound, up-to-date Greek text (with an abbreviated *apparatus criticus*) on the verso and a clear, plain, literal English rendition on the recto. There are helpful short introductions to the author as a whole and to the separate works, plus running notes. It may sound unsexy, but the enterprise is, in whole and in part, invaluable. These modestly priced volumes can in fact be recommended even to those who cannot read Greek and want to know what the texts said. The new editions are often replacing editions with less than stellar Greek texts and with English at once sodden with Victorian fustian ("High emprise brooketh no coward wight") and inaccurate. The joke had it that, in some of the old Loebs, one had to consult the Greek on the left to make sense of the English on the right. *Nous avons changé tout cela.*

Aristophanes is a special case. The old Loeb Aristophanes, first issued in 1924, was based on the texts and translations of Benjamin Bickley Rogers, an assiduous scholar and a deft comic versifier. (Five of his translations from Aristophanes composed the 1955 Doubleday-Anchor paperback that introduced many to the playwright.) The copy on the back of that book boasted of Roger's "lyric powers, which range from the pure song of Shelley to the witty patter of W. S. Gilbert."

To illustrate what Rogers could do, it is useful to cite a brief scene, the awe-inducing entrance of the chorus of Clouds in *Clouds*, followed by Socrates's devout welcome and by the newly enrolled pupil Strepsiades's terror:

CHORUS:
Clouds of all hue,
Rise we aloft with our garments of dew.
Come from old Ocean's unchangeable bed,
Come, till the mountain's green summits we tread,
Come to the peaks with their landscapes untold,
Gaze on the Earth with her harvests of gold,
Gaze on the rivers in majesty streaming,
Gaze on the lordly, invincible Sea,
Come, for the Eye of the Ether is beaming,
Come, for all Nature is flashing and free.
Let us shake off this close-clinging dew
From our members eternally new,
And sail upwards the wide world to view.
Come Away! Come Away!

SOCRATES:
O Goddesses mine, great Clouds and divine,
ye have heeded and answered my prayer.
Heard ye their sound, and thunder around,
as it thrilled through the tremulous air?

STREPSIADES:
Yes, by Zeus, and I shake and I'm all of a quake, and I fear I must sound a reply.
Their thunders have made my soul so afraid,
and those terrible voices so nigh:
So if lawful or not, I must run to a pot,
by Zeus, if I stop I shall die.

The Shelleyan rhapsody is here followed by Gilbertian patter in anapestic heptameters that rhyme internally and terminally. Whatever he missed, Rogers captured a genuinely Aristophanic lilt, brio, wit, and joy. There have been far worse introductions to Aristophanes—namely, most of the more or less smutty prose translations that have come along since.

But Rogers will no longer do. Aristophanes was more than a comic Edwardian with a lyric streak. He was dirty, he was political, and he had perhaps the most playful imagination of any writer who ever lived.

First, the dirty Aristophanes, the writer who revelled in, who was capable of taking ten lines to build up to, a dopey joke about excretion or buggery. The editor Jeffrey Henderson is the man to give us this side of the dramatist (not that he doesn't do, superbly, much more). He is the author of *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (Yale 1975; second edition, Oxford

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1991), a delightful tome that lists and explicates the obsessively frank language of Old Comedy under headings like "Male Organs—Proper, Euphemistic, Agriculture, Metaphor" "Female Organs—Agriculture, Gates, Rings and Circles, Holes, Sea Animals, Cookery, Food, Birds." It was 1975 and it was time for the sexual revolution, for the new *parrhesia*, to air out Aristophanes, and Professor Henderson did the job with vigor. His Loeb Aristophanes is as frank as one would expect. Here is his version of the same lines from *Clouds*:

> CHORUS:
> Clouds everlasting,
> let us arise, revealing our dewy bright form,
> from deep roaring father Ocean
> onto high mountain peaks
> with tresses of trees, whence
> to behold heights of distant vantage,
> and holy earth whose crops we water,
> and divine rivers' rushing,
> and the sea crashing with deep thunder.
> For heaven's tireless eye is ablaze
> with gleaming rays.
> So let us shake off the rainy haze
> from our deathless shape and survey
> the land, with telescopic eye.
>
> SOCRATES:
> Most stately Clouds, you have clearly heard my summons. (to Strepsiades) Did you mark their voice and, in concert, the bellowing thunder that prompts holy reverence?
>
> STEPSIADES:
> I do revere you, illustrious ones, and I'm ready to answer those thunderclaps with a fart; that's how much I fear and tremble at them. And right now, if it's sanctioned, and even if it isn't, I need to shit!

Rogers and Henderson display, perhaps, different kinds of fidelity to the spirit of Aristophanes, but there can be no question which is the more accurate. In the lyric strophe, "clouds everlasting" is what the Greek says, not "clouds of all hue"; "rainy haze" and "telescopic eye" are also more literal renderings. In the dialogue, the excretory references are explicit. But here too, in this very explicitness, something is lost. Call it the sense of the surprising, the naughty, the unexpected that clings to the Greek (in Aristophanes, the obscene and the scataological often occur as bathetic closing words or phrases in lines that have until then been aping the solemn diction of tragedy). In today's American English, Henderson's monosyllables are merely plumped down with an effect of numb banality. Indecorousness depends on decorum, and the collapse of decorum in today's language (and culture) means that indecorousness is without force or savor. But these developments are not Henderson's fault; he is right to go for the full verbal monty and he could, in fact, have skipped an apology for the plays' political incorrectness. "Old Comedy," he writes, "may strike some readers as being shockingly crude, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, or the like. But we should bear in mind . . ." blah blah blah. Between coarseness and the new book-burning, let us by all means choose coarseness.

Aristophanes is political and topical. In his general preface Henderson swallows hard and admits that

> The wealthy as a class are never criticised, whereas the poor often are. . . . All of his political targets were on what may be called the left. . . . This bias cannot be satisfactorily explained as merely an automatic response to the political predominance of the left during Aristophanes' career, on the theory that political comedy tends to attack the powers that be whatever their political stripe, for these reasons: Aristophanes also mentions some political figures favorably, all of them opponents of leftists; he not only ridicules leftist policies but also champions right-wing policies on their merits; and during periods when the leftists were in eclipse, he continues to attack them and to spare the currently ascendant rightists.

These are truths scholars have often shirked facing. But what complicates the translating

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and reading of Aristophanes is not his overall ideology but the plethora of references to political cowards, official bribetakers, demagogic buggerees, and so on. The plays are thickly implicated in the minutiae of Athenian public and private life, mostly during the tense years of the Peloponnesian War. This pervasive topicality—plus an equally pervasive addiction to puns—is what makes Aristophanes resistant to translation and impossible to revive. "This boy can't learn any mode but the Quid Pro Quorian," writes Henderson in an attempt to render, in *Knights*, the word *dorodokisti*, which is a portmanteau pun on "Dorian" (a musical mode) and "bribe-taking." Can we really hear "Gregorian" behind Henderson's "Quid Pro Quorian" or is it wasted donnish cleverness? His version of another pun in *Knights*—"Athene Tritogenes tritogenated it"—needs, in order to be understood, both a footnote and a look across the page at the Greek.

Except for the overrated *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes is seldom revived off campuses because of this topicality. (The generic tales of long-lost heiresses and wily slaves that dominate the subsequent New Comedy—of, for example, Menander—have proved wholly comprehensible and infinitely adaptable.) A recurrent temptation is to adapt an Aristophanic text to contemporary circumstances, as in a recent production of *Lysistrata* that featured New York's Mayor Giuliani as the heavy. Such ideas are always mistaken.

The five plays, the earliest surviving, in these two volumes were written in the years 425–421 B.C., grim years in the middle of the seesawing war. In *Acharnians*, a simple old rustic called Dicaeopolis ("Just-city") tires of his war-caused suffering and makes a separate peace. In a key scene that depends on a kind of dramaturgical pun or metonymy, Dicaeopolis drinks three peace agreements, "spondai" meaning both "libation" and "treaty." This characteristic trope of Aristophanes shows his taste for linguistic play, his penchant for making the abstract concrete and the concrete abstract. He may have been a political conservative, but he was, imaginatively, a child of the fifth-century Sophistic Enlightenment. He rejected the moral relativism of the Sophists; indeed, his fervent patriotism and his filial reverence for the old generation that won Marathon shine through everywhere. But his sensibility was drawn to the Sophistic sense of language as a site of inversion, play and surprise. He had Lewis Carroll's view of language as a field of nonsense, joined to Dickens's feel for society, Rabelais's bawdiness, and Ben Jonson's knack for comic construction. The writer he reminds me most of is the Joyce of *Ulysses*; Joyce's talky, smelly, metamorphic Dublin is sister to Aristophanes's Athens.

Knights is, as Henderson says, a sort of allegory in which Demos (i.e., the People), a deluded geezer, is being bamboozled by a scheming slave (a character based closely and clearly on Cleon, the corrupt, vain, belligerent *novus homo* who succeeded Pericles in power in Athens and was the playwright's pet hate). An even more outrageous flatterer succeeds this Cleon-type in the favor of Demos but—surprise!—proves to be a true "lover" (*erastes*) of Demos and transforms the old man back into the youth he was at the time of the Persian Wars in 490–480: "Here he is for all to see, wearing a golden cricket, resplendent in his old-time costume, smelling not of ballot shells but peace accords."

Peace (421) again finds a rustic, this time a vintner, sick of war. He decides to excavate peace in the form of a statue, after first flying to heaven on a Pegasus-parodying dung-beetle to complain to Zeus about the war.

These are plays directly concerned with the war, seen always as dependent on anti-Spartan fervor whipped up by interested demagogues. *Wasps* (422) attacks another institution of the out-of-control democracy: the law courts staffed by huge paid popular juries. A loving son called, by Henderson, Loathecleon (could I suggest Cleophobe?) tries to keep his jury-addicted father, called

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Lovecleon (Cleophile?) at home by arranging for the old man to put the family dog on trial for stealing cheese. Again, the old generation that won Marathon and created Athenian greatness has been corrupted by demagoguery and government handouts (here, jury pay).

Clouds (423, but the version we have is an incomplete revision dating from some four to seven years later) takes on the new education, presented as a hotbed of pseudo-science, public rhetoric (both in the assembly and in court), lewdness, and atheism. Once again a grumpy geezer takes matters (here, bankruptcy at the hands of his spendthrift son) into his own hands; he decides to enrol in the Thinkery run by arch-Sophist Socrates in order to learn how to outargue his creditors in court. Much ink has been spilled—from Plato on—worrying whether or to what degree the portrait of Socrates as bombastic, cynical, atheistic, and (above all) greedy had any justification. Henderson's verdict is blandly evasive: "In the absence of unbiased information about Socrates, however, we must accept *Clouds* as a valid expression of what public opinion believed, or might be expected to believe, about him in the Athens of 423–*c.* 416." True or not, the play's Socrates remains a definitive and hilarious picture of the intellectual as fraud. Aristophanes's metamorphically vivifying imagination is at its most intense here; the central *agon* (debate) pits Better Argument, praiser of the old ways and days and virtues, against Worse Argument, a glib deconstructor of traditional mores. Henderson's text in *Clouds* stays close to that of Dover's 1968 edition; he does, however, catch a double entendre missed by Dover: "compass" in the sense of a leg-spreading "passive homosexual." *Clouds* came in third and last in the play-judging in 423, perhaps because Socrates's cunning and atheism triumphed in the story and the audience was shocked; the revision has Socrates's Thinkery burned to the ground by a pious Strepsiades. Aristophanes expresses his anger at the audience in the revised *parabasis*, or direct address to the audience, but he abandoned the attempt to rewrite the play. These were dangerous waters, even for a merry playwright.

Henderson's sound texts and plain translations give us exactly the Aristophanes we need: a reliable prose waiting to be quickened into poetic life by the reader's imagination, laughter, and amazement.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

The betrayal of liberalism, X
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Commentary
April 1999

MUSIC

Masterpieces of the Century: A Critical Guide

Terry Teachout

A quarter-century ago, the history of 20th-century music looked quite different from the way it looks today. Many critics and scholars believed then that the universal acceptance of serialism—the nontonal method of harmonic organization invented by Arnold Schoenberg and disseminated throughout the Western world by his students and disciples—was inevitable. Others, like the composer-historian Eric Salzman, thought the future of classical music lay with even more "advanced" developments than serialism.

By the 1980's, however, it was becoming clear that the critics and scholars were wrong. For one thing, the listening public had remained all but unanimous in its rejection of nontonal music. For another, the succe[ss] of new "minimalist" co[m]posers like Philip Glass [and] [Ste]ve Reich [had] [ca]ught on with a large audience. Worst of all, the serialist establishment, by [ref]using to musi[c] grammar is crucial to [the] intelligibility of language, the living line of classical music was understood by critics to run instead.

The first step in rewriting the history of 20th-century music, then, is to ask: what were the works that will be listened to and loved so long as music itself continues to be made?

In recent years there have been surprisingly few serious attempts to address this question. In part, no doubt, that is because the very act of canon-making is now regarded with derision by left-wing scholars.

What follows is my own list of 50 classical masterpieces composed since 1900, together, in each case, with my recommendation of a recording or, occasionally, recordings.

1902

1. Claude Debussy
Pelléas et Mélisande

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1903

2. Maurice Ravel
String Quartet in F

Debussy and Ravel are invariably discussed in tandem as the twin avatars of musical impressionism, but they were in fact as dissimilar as

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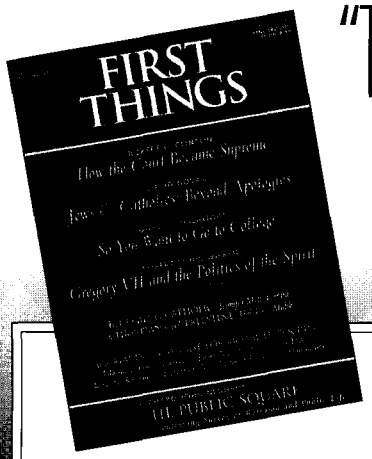

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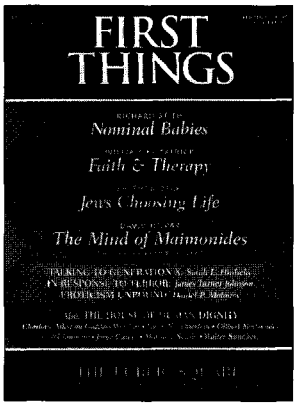

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